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THE ARMY AND SPACE FLIGHT

AMERICAN military space scientists were reported, as announcing, in a UP dispatch just before Christmas, that a maximum effort could put a manned American space station six hundred miles above the earth by 1962, five steps being outlined that would take man to the Moon.

1. Earth satellite tests, including unmanned rockets to nearby planets to get data on cosmic rays, meteorites and densities.
2. Launching and *successful return to Earth* of a manned satellite.
3. Establishment of space stations five to six hundred miles above the Earth, which could serve as departure points for rockets aimed at the planets.
4. Establishment of a space station twenty-two and a half thousand miles above Earth, circling the Earth every twenty-four hours.
5. Space ship flights between space stations and—to begin with—the Moon.

This Army interest in space flight is not new. As Major General H. N. Toftoy, of Redstone Arsenal, pointed out at the Eighth International Astronautical Congress in Barcelona in October, 1957, the Army has long played an important role in scientific progress. "As early as 1941, the United States Ordnance Corps became interested in the development of large supersonic rockets. At the beginning we realized that in pioneering this new field of technology the frontiers of basic science would have to be advanced. This they were at an unprecedented rate," some of these efforts providing "vehicles for exploration of the higher atmosphere."

"In the fall of 1945 the Jet Propulsion Laboratories fired the Army's *Wac-Corporal* missile to an altitude of 43 miles. From this first American liquid-propelled supersonic rocket several important scientific applications evolved. The *Aerobee* upper-air sounding rocket was a scaled-up version. The most historic achievement of the *Wac-Corporal,*" continued General Toftoy, "was the part it played in February 1949, when, launched from a V-2, it served as the second stage of the *Bumper* missile and established altitude and velocity records which only recently have been surpassed." In eventually "reaching an altitude of 250 miles (400 kilometres) the Army was credited with being the first to send a man-made object outside the earth's atmosphere."

The Army pioneered in still another field, of particular interest to SF readers—communication through interplanetary space. "On 10 January 1946," to again quote the General, "at moonrise, the Signal Corps Engineering Laboratories beamed their radar signals towards the moon. Within a few seconds, the first signals ever reflected from the moon were detected upon their radarscopes.

Here, then, is a bare hint at the years of research preceding present and future accomplishments. *It is not impossible that one day a satellite will be involved in an attack such as is shown on our cover. When that day comes—if it does come—we know the Armed Forces will be prepared!*

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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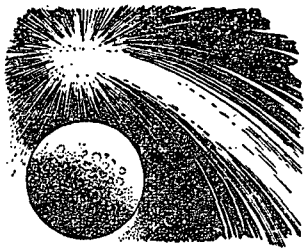

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deadly silence

by . . . James E. Gunn

Earth was fantastically fair and fertile — and vulnerable — as the initial success of the aliens quickly proved.

CASE HISTORY
Kevin Gregg, age 31

The patient is a freelance writer of fact articles. He suffers from a neurosis whose chief externalization is hysterical reaction to loud noise. As a consequence, he seldom leaves his room, where he is fortunate enough to do most of his work; when he does leave, it is with great reluctance and considerable psychic strain.

This noise-withdrawal system is symptomatic of the society as a whole; it is a retreat of the psyche from the indecipherable confusion set up by society's unbearable tensions and unreachable goals. It is a yearning for the impregnable peace and silence of the womb.

The patient's refuge is the bathroom, where he relaxes for hours at a time in hot bathwater. The womb-amniotic fluid symbolism could not be clearer.

The patient believes that his neurosis stems from a traumatic experience during World War II, when he commanded a battery of anti-aircraft guns on a carrier off Okinawa. . . .

It was a floating island of noise.

James Gunn returns after a much too long absence with this thrilling novel of a strange invasion. The first reaction to the silence had been that here was a miracle. The second was that here was something alien, incredibly demoralizing in its utter simplicity, sinister and effective.

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The unceasing roar of the planes was a tapestry into which the other sounds were woven—the chatter of the twenty-millimeter guns, the "crump-crump-crump-crump!" of the forty-millimeter quad-mounts, the jarring blows of the five-inch rifles, the wail of sirens, the raucous hysteria of horns. . . .

The kamikaze came out of nowhere. Kevin spun and stared in a paralysis of terror. The wings of the Japanese plane were a thin, straight line bisected by the slim barrel-end of the fuselage, blurred by the prop. It was heading directly for the carrier, unswervingly toward Kevin. Closer it came and closer, through the futile white and black puffs of the bursting shells. Over the noise came the roaring of the engine. . . .

Kevin screamed. . . .

He sat up on the couch, shivering, and stuck his hands deep into jacket pockets to stop them shaking. "It's no better, Doctor Fleming."

"These things take time."

"I guess I'm lucky," Kevin said grimly. "My occupation keeps me off the streets. I'm like the little mermaid who wanted feet; wherever she walked it was like stepping on razor blades. Too bad I don't write fiction—then I wouldn't have to go out at all."

Fleming smiled behind the Freud-like beard. "What you need is a little bottle of silence to carry around with you wherever you go."

The bar was dim and quiet. Softly, from concealed speakers, drifted Debussy's *L'Après-midi d'un faune*. The chilled air was delicately scented with tobacco smoke and ethyl alcohol.

In the dark corner booth, Hugh Pryor squirmed his pudgy body around the table, hinting that the discussion was coming to an end. "Rhine approach fine—if you want to prove presence or absence of psi. Isn't enough. Must have something practical to work on, to develop. No good unless you can put it on practical basis."

"But according to Rhine," objected Kevin, who always researched his articles thoroughly *before* he went to his authority, "the very essence of the phenomenon is its lack of physical attributes."

"I don't believe it. That's because I'm a physical scientist. I don't believe in anything until I've held it in my hands, measured it." He raised the schooner of beer and drained it. "Believe in beer. Unless telepathic emanations can be picked up, modulated, broadcasted—why, telepathy is no more valuable than —ghosts."

Kevin thought of the long trip home. "No story, eh?"

"Not yet. We've got a machine —call it a telepathy machine if you like—only no way of telling if it's working. If it's broadcasting, nobody receives; if it's a receiver, nobody's broadcasting."

"It's a ghostmaker," Kevin said wryly. "Since ghosts are invisible and immaterial, you can't prove it."

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"Exactly. Write that up and you'll never get another story from me. Who knows? Maybe we'll imitate Columbus—get something out of the gadget yet—maybe not telepathy but something even better." He chuckled and got up.

Kevin led the way toward the heavy, plate-glass door. It had been a waste of time after all; the torment had been useless.

It was Friday, June 13, 1958. Summer had come early. Heat sizzled off concrete sidewalks and black-top streets. Noise was quivering violence in the air. It was like being hit in the face with a soggy tambourine.

Kevin flinched and tried to draw back, but Pryor was behind him. "How do we stand it?" Kevin asked painfully.

Pryor understood instantly. It was his greatest talent. With him there was no need for weary transitions—he constructed them himself. And yet to some people it was disturbing—the quick, almost telepathic intuition from the round, bland face with the blue-marble eyes.

"Deafness," Pryor said. "Physical, psychological. Physically, the middle ear's tympanic muscles contract, reduce excessive displacement of the ossicular chain. Psychologically, we tune it out automatically—like the mother—sleeps through roar of low-flying airplane but leaps out of bed at whimper of baby across room."

"Some people can tune it out," Kevin corrected. "But I don't mean how—I mean why."

"Listen! Really listen!" Pryor cocked his head like a fat robin after a worm. "What do you hear?"

Kevin listened.

Car horns blared, tires shrieked, radios outshouted each other: commercial - jazz - newscast - baseball - ballad. . . . Along Twelfth Street the streetcars clanged and clattered. A pedestrian shouted obscenities at a truck driver. Above a men's clothing store a loudspeaker extolled the cool comfort of tropical weave (*"It Breathes"*); distantly came the thump of an air compressor and the ear-splitting chatter of a pneumatic drill. . . .

Over everything was the bees-murmur of people saying the ancient, unchanging things. Under everything was the city's background rumble that could not be reduced to its constituent bangs and dins and roars and blasts. . . .

The City. The heat magnified it like a mirage over the desert, making it larger and louder than life. . . .

Kevin shuddered.

"The song of civilization," Pryor said softly, "and its price. The music people make when they live together. The music of the gears. Grinding out the necessities of life: power, tools, things in cans. Noise. The price of inefficiency, like heat a byproduct of friction, energy wasted in meaningless assaults on the eardrums.

"Man is the eternal refutation of

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biology's statement that an organism can't live in a medium of its own byproducts."

"You call this living?"

"Hell, I don't know why we stand it. Let's go back for a quick one."

The bar was hushed and dark and restful. Kevin resisted the yearning. He knew what Doctor Fleming would say: womb surrogate.

Moving south along Baltimore was a knotted cluster of bobbing heads like flies around a drop of syrup. People turned to look, they hesitated, they followed.

"I haven't seen anything like that," Pryor muttered, "since the Pied Piper led the kids out of Hamelin."

The Pied Piper turned out to be a bearded, middle-aged man in a cocoa-brown suit and two-tone, woven shoes. On his face was the expression of a saint who has just been welcomed into the kingdom of heaven. He was at peace.

Then the silence enveloped them.

To Kevin it was like falling into a deep, lovely pool, like spiraling down through hushed, green depths that soothed raw nerve endings and relaxed the long-knotted muscles.

People passed, feet trampling, mouths opening and shutting—it was all pantomime. Sound had ceased. Pryor was trying to say something. Kevin watched his lips moving and sighed.

". . . where they sell them," Pryor said.

The clamor was like a club. Kevin's knees sagged.

The Pied Piper had passed. His aura of silence had passed with him.

Kevin saw the sign on his back before the crowd closed in. It seemed to be printed on the cloth, but that was illusion: it blinked, lighting up one word at a time and then all three simultaneously:

SILENCE
IS
GOLDEN

"And somebody has found the gold mine," Kevin said.

Pryor looked inquiringly after the crowd.

"No. I don't want to know where he's going; I want to know where he's been. Because whatever he's got, he got it there."

Pryor chuckled. "Beautiful logic. Lead, kindly logic!"

For the first time in ten years, Kevin ignored the noise. He headed north, watchful. "It wasn't a hallucination, was it?" he muttered. "You—didn't hear it—either, did you?"

"I didn't—I did. Canceling vibrations. Must be way it's done. We could do it; just haven't got around to it yet. Sound's a wave form, you know. Combine it with another wave—exactly same intensity, same frequency—one hundred eighty degrees out of phase—result: silence. Cancel each other. Sometimes called interference."

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"By any other name," said Kevin. "I want one."

"*You* want one! I want a dozen. I want to hold it in my hands, lay it on my laboratory bench, dissect it—find out how someone packed a ton of diaphragms, wiring circuits, and electronic components into a portable. . . ."

His words were chopped off sharply. Their momentum carried them on. Kevin said, "Here's your chance."

It was a hole-in-the-wall on Twelfth Street. It could have been a magazine stand, a novelty store, a tailor's shop. Now there was only a narrow, plate-glass window so clean it was almost invisible in its anonymous porcelain framework. No lettering was on the window; no sign was above it.

Inside was a shelf covered with carelessly ruffled white satin. Resting on it casually, as if someone had laid it down and forgotten it, was a slim, black box, like a cigarette case carved out of ebony and lovingly polished by generations.

It was perfect.

Kevin was unconscious of being jostled by the thrusting crowd. He stood on the sidewalk, longing. Someone had taste. Someone knew him down to the secret core of prejudice.

He hated salesmen. He hated the ceaseless blatancy of advertising, irritating the subconscious until the itch was scratched.

A single diamond on a field of black velvet—that was Kevin's idea of salesmanship. "If this is the kind of thing you want, this is where you can get it." Simple, effective. Creating a need—not artificial like the pearl formed around a grain of sand—that was the eternal tribute consciousness pays to beauty.

Kevin stepped forward. There was a sibilance, and the City was hushed. He stepped back. The City screamed, stridently, senselessly. He edged forward.

"Shhhh!" The City obeyed. At the periphery of silence was a surface murmuring that said, "Shhhh!" Softly.

A hand drew Kevin back into violence. He looked up angrily, recognized Pryor, grimaced. Shoppers passed them, hastening through the silence, lifting their heads wakefully as if they had just lost something they didn't know they had and then walking on, frowning, as if they couldn't remember what it was.

"Got any money?" Pryor asked softly.

"About thirty dollars."

"Just cashed a check. Got a hundred or so. Comes to more than thirty, I pay. Okay?"

"It's okay, but I don't get it."

Pryor shrugged pudgy shoulders. "Call it a hunch. Don't sign your name to anything."

It was unreal like a dream in which everything is noiseless and molasses-slow. The door unlatched soundlessly. They walked across thick, beige carpeting silently and stopped in front of a short, blond counter, the only furniture in the

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room. Behind it was a dark doorway.

Kevin studied the place. The walls were undecorated; they were painted a rich brown.

When Kevin turned, a girl was behind the counter looking at them inquisitively.

Her appearance was shocking. Not because she didn't belong in the shop but because she did. It seemed as if the shop had been designed around her—or vice versa. Her hair was the reddish-brown of the walls, her complexion the blondness of the counter, her eyes the black of the case in the window. . . .

Kevin turned, jabbed his forefinger meaningfully toward the display, pulled out his billfold, and looked expectant.

She put a hand to her chin. "You don't act as if you were mute. Are you trying to tell me that you want to buy a Silencer?"

Kevin's jaw dropped. Pryor chuckled delightedly. The girl's lips curved upward at the corners. They were lovely lips, Kevin noticed. She was small; her head would come not much higher than his shoulders. "I thought—" he mumbled and broke off hopelessly.

"Charades are fun," the girl said, "but impractical as a general means of communication. There's a Silencer at the front and one at the back. The walls are only soundproofed."

"How much?" Kevin asked bluntly.

"Twenty-nine ninety-five." She brought a slim, black case out from under the counter and laid it on the blond wood.

A shrewd figure: $29.95. Like the girl's, small but desirable. Anyone could afford it; nobody would throw one away.

Pryor reached out greedily, restrained himself, and looked up at the girl. "How does it work?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. But how to work it, I can tell you. Just press the sides." She pressed; silence was a cocoon around them. She pressed again. "Repeat it, and it's off. Simple?"

Kevin picked it up, pressed twice. The slick, plasticoid material yielded and sprang back. "Damned simple." He handed the case to Pryor.

"Too simple," Pryor muttered.

"The area of silence is approximately six feet radially from the Silencer," she continued. "The power source is self-contained and should last the lifetime of the purchaser. If it should fail to work properly for any reason, return it to this shop and it will be replaced without charge. Questions?"

Pryor was studying the case. "Who makes them?"

"Sorry," she said.

"You don't know?"

"I can't tell you."

"There's nothing at all on the case," Pryor said to Kevin, "no manufacturer's name, no patent number or pat-pending."

"Any questions I can answer?" she asked.

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"What's your name?" asked Kevin.

She smiled sweetly and shook her head.

"How long have you worked here?"

Again the headshake.

"Live in town?"

"About the Silencer," she prompted.

"Why look a gift horse in the mouth?"

He removed two tens and two fives from his billfold.

She handed him a nickle in change. As he fumbled for it, her hand brushed his; it had a smooth, moist feel. She jerked her hand back.

Pryor deposited the Silencer in Kevin's outstretched palm.

"And you, sir?" she said to Pryor.

"I'll take three."

"Sorry, sir. Only one to a customer."

"Ridiculous. No special sale, is it?"

"No, sir, but I have my instructions."

"From whom?"

"From my employers."

"Who are they?"

She smiled and shrugged.

"Front-page news can't be kept secret," Pryor said scornfully. "And this gadget will be a mystery about as long as it takes to pry it open."

"Yes, sir," she agreed politely. "Do you want one?"

Frowning, he paid and accepted the Silencer.

"Thank you, gentlemen, and good afternoon."

"When can I see you again?" Kevin asked bluntly, moving around the end of the counter.

"When your Silencer breaks," she said, smiling gently. "I warn you, though—they're sturdy. Good-by."

"Wait—!' he began.

She held up a hushing finger to her lips, and Kevin's words were swallowed up. Out of a pocket on the breast of the beige dress, she lifted a slim, black case. She smiled quickly and vanished through the doorway.

Outside, Kevin muttered, "A mint, a mint—a real mint."

"Very shrewd. Very clever," Pryor said softly. "Very strange. How much are they losing on each one? This can't be made for thirty dollars—not even if we had the technology. And we don't."

"Of course we do."

"No, we don't. And why isn't it patented?"

Kevin laughed; it was almost hysterical. "That's your problem. Find out what makes it tick—or what makes it stop ticks. I'm just going to enjoy it. It's time I started living a little."

"Speaking of living, what was the deal with the girl?"

"I'm in love with her."

"Are you crazy?"

"A little. I know what my psychiatrist would say: 'Oedipus complex. The girl is a mother surrogate. Obvious womb symbolism.

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Keeper of the silence.' The hell with Doctor Fleming!"

In the distance, along Twelfth Street, came the Pied Piper luring the children with his pipes of silence.

"So long, Hugh—here comes the mob!"

Kevin waved, pressed his right-hand jacket pocket, and sauntered blissfully across the street.

A bakery truck screeched to a stop inches behind him. He didn't notice.

Omaha, Neb., June 14. (AP)

—Lines formed early today for the opening of this city's Silencer shops. How so many people learned of them is a mystery mass-psychology experts must explain.

Omahans are too elated to ask questions. Shops were opened only in the forty most populous cities, down to and including Omaha—barely.

We asked one man why he was standing in line. His answer is as good as any: "I've been needing something like this for twenty years."

Today was his twentieth wedding anniversary. . . .

FASHION IN THE NEWS

The latest thing—as late as yesterday's headlines—in men's and women's fashions is the Silencer pocket. This season's motto has suddenly become: "It isn't new without a pocket."

Nobody is going anywhere without a Silencer.

Even pillows are coming equipped with special places, but this—in the opinion of many shoppers—is carrying things too far. The pillow case is good enough for most of them. . . .

(Feature story in the *Kansas City Star*, June 20, bylined: Kevin Gregg)

Commercial history has nothing to compare with the appearance of the Silencer shops. From the initial one, they spread like dandelions in the spring—suddenly they were everywhere, all identical.

They don't advertise. They don't have to. Word of mouth is more than adequate. Neighboring merchants estimate that one thousand Silencers were sold the first day, ten thousand the second, and more than fifty thousand a day by the end of the week.

The manufacturers—whoever they are—and the retailers—whoever the salesgirls are working for—have not been located for comment. The girls have been picked carefully. They won't even say "No."

The neighboring merchants talk—unhappily.

Two exceptions to the general gloom are hotelmen and restaurateurs. They consider the Silencer better than a major-league baseball team. Kansas City is the

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only place in the trade area where a Silencer may be purchased.

How long can the fifty-thousand-a-day rate last before the market is satiated? Too long, say the neighboring merchants.

The Silencer shops' one-to-a-person regulation has proved unworkable, but it is untrue that hotel and eatery men induced the postal authorities to ban the ingenious devices from the mails. The truth of the matter is that pranksters were turning them on before wrapping. For three days, the post office here was like a morgue.

. . "Demoralizing," said Postmaster. . . .

(Editorial in the *Kansas City Times*, June 21)

Anti-Noise forces have finally come into their own. They have revived the old laws and put teeth into them. Now they have a weapon: Be quiet or be muzzled!

Public noisemakers are accepting the situation; the means are cheap and efficient. The little black cases have silenced many an old screech: streetcars, bulldozers, trains, factories, pneumatic drills. . . .

The Silencer has even replaced the automobile muffler.

For the first time in history, parents can say "Shut up!" and make it stick.

It is reported that bobbysoxers have begun sewing Dayglo signs to the backs of their sweaters: Actions speak louder than words.

Thoughtful employers have even installed Silencers in offices and shops.

The golden age of silence is at hand. . . .

(TIME, June 22)

THE NATION

The Portable Womb

From Edmundston, Maine, to San Diego, California, the great American public was smiling seraphically this week as it walked about its business in a private, portable womb.

The silence was heavenly.

In the vast, delightful hush, the mystery of the Silencers and the secrecy of the shops that sell them was almost forgotten. Nobody had an urge to find flaws in the ointment.

It might break the spell.

Eighteenth century Irish philosopher Bishop Berkeley theorized that nothing exists except as it is perceived. Would the events of this week have been final proof?

What Is Noise? *Even in Berkeley's day, the theory had its critics. Dictionarist Samuel Johnson stumbled over a stone in the road and said, "Thus I refute Berkeley."*

What is noise? A later authority on words, Webster, defines it as "loud, confused, or senseless shouting; clamor." But there

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is another meaning: "Sound or a sound of any sort."

Every sound contains information, even the most useless. The roaring of the Super Chief warns: "Stay out of the way or get smashed!"

Speech is noise.

Proof.

Does noise exist if no one hears it? If Samuel Johnson were alive, he would point to the soaring accident rate.

The annual accident rate in the U. S. is 10 million, 100 thousand fatal. Out of last week's 1 million accidents, 10 thousand people died.

They were walking into the path of the Super Chief. They couldn't hear it.

They were mangled by cars, streetcars, pushcars, forklifts, buses, tractors, bulldozers, steam-rollers, power shovels, ambulances, fire trucks, falling safes, spinning lathes. . . .

A noiseless lathe seems harmless.

The great American public is learning that wombs can be dangerous. . . .

"There is a psychic danger in dramatization," said Doctor Fleming. "It is unwise to let these peripheral experiences become meaningful."

"The Silencer? Peripheral? Not to me, Doctor. Do you have one?"

"I have no need for one."

"If it hadn't been for mine," Kevin said grimly, "I wouldn't have made it to your office today."

"I have a theory that many neuroses are noise-induced, especially in the industrial societies with their high pressures and higher decibel ratings. Control the noise, and there will be a saner society."

"The noise is being controlled. The question is: will there be a society left to enjoy the sanity?"

The doctor ruffled the clippings and frowned behind his beard. "These indicate that your trauma is more deeply rooted than I suspected. This clipping of articles finding fault with the Silencers indicates an ambivalence toward noise which may lead us into interesting regions. I offer you this warning: now that you have your bottle of silence, it would be dangerous to reject it."

"Clippings are part of my business," Kevin said calmly. "I thought that these might have significance to you, but I don't know—sometimes I think that psychiatry becomes enmeshed in its own sticky search for meaning—

"Maybe you can make something of a new dream I've had lately. It's completely silent. There's something chasing me—faceless, voiceless, and its name is Terror. The silence is like molasses around my feet. I can't scream. . . ."

At his rooming house was a telegram from TIME:

INVESTIGATE LOCAL ACCIDENT RATE AND RETAIL

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SALES DROP. WIRE DETAILS FOR ROUNDUP OF POSSIBLE COUNTERMEASURES.

Kevin retrieved the *Times* from the wastebasket and flipped to the business page. Retail sales were off 25%. It could have been worse—a generation later. A truly television-centered society would have died within days. As it was, commercials were finished. The Silencers came on when the announcer did. Sincerity without sound is hilarious.

The *Times* was loaded with ads. They still pulled, Kevin supposed. Newspapers were made to be read in silence.

Kevin turned on his television set and watched for a few minutes. Networking advertising was unaffected—long-term contracts being what they were—but spot commercials had vanished. Advertising managers had spotted the truth early, and the local stations were dying.

But the state of business couldn't be due entirely to the silencing of the commercials. People weren't living on the jittery rim of failure any more. For once in their lives, they were at peace.

High-pressure advertising was America's answer to the disappearance of the old world markets for the surplus production of free enterprise. Under its goad, the United States achieved the highest standard of living in the world. Also the highest suicide rate.

Now, in his silent cocoon, the American consumer was contented, and there was no stick to poke him out. The discontent-makers were weaponless.

It was time, Kevin thought. And then, *but it could be disastrous.*

On the twenty-first floor of City Hall, the Safety Director swung back his swivel chair from the long view over the river and said, "What can we do?"

"Then you're not doing anything," Kevin said.

"I didn't say that," he said nervously as Kevin's pencil hovered over a sheaf of gray copy paper folded lengthwise. "We haven't reached any—final decision. We're—ah—still considering alternatives."

"Stumped."

"No, no! We've got a licensing system worked out—"

"What good will that do?" Kevin demanded. "Will licensing the Silencers keep people from wearing them on the streets? Will it protect them from juggernauts they can't hear?"

The director spread his hands out helplessly. "What can we do?" he repeated in a whispering, frightened voice. "They're not dangerous—not in themselves. We can't prohabit possession. All we can do is plead with the public to show some self-restraint, ask them not to turn on the things when they're out. . . ."

When Kevin closed the door, the director was staring out over the river again. There was a look of quiet desperation in his eyes.

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Merchants Association headquarters was two blocks away. Kevin hesitated as he left City Hall, took a deep breath, and clicked off his Silencer. Even without it, the City was almost silent.

At the first intersection, an ambulance, siren wailing, bucked a red light and smashed into the side of a red convertible. The girl driver was thrown thirty feet. The Silencer in her pocket was unbroken.

Kevin cringed away from the noise and slowly dragged his hand away from his Silencer. He *could* survive without it; with it his chances were not so good.

At Eleventh and Walnut, a black sedan, turning the corner, hit a careless middle-aged woman. She got off lucky with only a broken leg. Kevin shouted a warning at a gray-haired man as an overhead sign ripped free.

He didn't even look up before he was crushed, silently, to the sidewalk.

The Secretary of the Merchants Association was an effervescent little man with a perspiring bald head. "We're full of ideas," he bubbled. "This is just a temporary thing, you know. We're buying them up, for one thing. Thirty-five dollars apiece. Got five thousand already."

"What makes you think the people who sell them don't just turn around and buy another?" Kevin asked, puzzled.

"Can't, you know. Their rule. One to a customer, eh? God knows what we'd do if it weren't for that."

The little man wasn't going to be much help; he was living in a dream world. "Sales have picked up, then?"

"Can't take almost two million bucks a day out of town without hurting business. But when the demand is satisfied— Well, the Silencer people make a good, sturdy product with a lifetime guarantee. No return trade, eh? Sometimes I think they must be crazy. We'll last them out."

"You can't buy them out and last them out both."

"Of course not. We're working on a whole new theory of advertising. All visual. Powerful stuff! You'll see. Within a couple of weeks people will be buying like mad. . . ."

Like mad, Kevin thought bleakly as he came out into the silence and the sunshine. Like mad, and it was time somebody realized it.

Silence can be a deadly thing.

Kevin wired his brief report to TIME and dialed the Central Research Institute from the booth in the Western Union office.

"Found out anything?" Pryor repeated. "Keep away, for one thing. Hands off policy. Be good as new in a month or so. That's why no patent. Don't need it—self-destructive. Try to open one—melts in your hands. Nothing left but some common metals and plastics. Twenty-sixth trial today—nitrogen atmosphere—no difference. Try analyzing

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a machine through a spectroscope."

"I'm beginning to be afraid of them," Kevin said.

"You, too?"

"You haven't found out who makes them?"

"Nope."

"Time somebody did."

"Yep," Pryor agreed. "Let me know, will you?"

"Yeah," Kevin said.

It was no time for heroics. Across the street from the little hole-in-the-wall was a coffee shop. Kevin sat in it and stirred a cold cup of coffee with an aimless spoon and waited for her to come through a silent doorway into the silent street—a girl with reddish-brown hair, a blond complexion, and eyes as black as ebony.

He counted thirty-two customers in three hours.

It was almost 7 p.m. when she stepped out of the shop. By the time she had the door locked, Kevin was behind her.

"You again," she said without surprise.

"Go to the head of the class."

"What do you want?"

"Information."

"Better ask the teacher."

"Where do I find him?"

She shrugged impatiently.

"My name is Kevin Gregg," he said evenly. "I write articles for a living—if you think I'm playing games, look it up; I've got one in the current *American*—and all I want is some answers. Maybe I'll write them up, and maybe I'll give them to the police or the F.B.I. Because this is a serious business, and you're mixed up in something with a very strange odor. . . ."

There was no use continuing. He wasn't getting through.

She smiled at him coldly out of her protective mantle of silence and tried to brush past. Kevin caught her arm and swung her back roughly. She opened her mouth to scream but no sound came out. Kevin tore her purse out of her hand, opened it, pulled out a Silencer. He squeezed it once.

"As I was saying," he continued, as if there had been no interruption, "this is a serious business—"

"You common thief!" she panted. "I'll—"

"You'll listen to me. Try to scream, and I'll cut you off." He held up the Silencer. "This makes it easy. I'm not playing games; I haven't got time. I want information, bad. Maybe you aren't going to give it to me, but you're going to listen."

Her lips compressed, she glared back at him. "Hurry up. I'm listening."

"Look at what I hold in my hand. Looks innocent, doesn't it? It fools you: it's a killer. In a week, in this city alone, it killed five hundred and twelve people. Killed them just as surely as if it had emitted death rays. Men, women, children—more than five hundred of them dead who would have been alive if these damned things had never been invented."

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"I haven't heard anything like that," she said. "I don't believe it."

"Of course you haven't heard it. That's the terrible part. They died in pantomime. Come out on the street during the rush hour and you'll see them die—maimed, mangled, mashed. See the blood in the gutters. Because they didn't hear the shout, the siren, the horn, the motor. . . ."

"That's what you're talking about," she said quickly. "You can't blame that on the Silencers, any more than you can blame automobiles for traffic accidents. There's no way to control the use people make of them."

"Transportation is a necessity. Silence is a luxury. We're just learning how expensive it can be. But if you can really quiet your conscience that easily, I've made a mistake."

"What do you want to know?" she asked in a low voice as he started to turn away.

"Where these things come from," he said urgently. "Who makes them. Where—"

"I can't tell you those things," she said, frowning.

"Can't or won't?"

"There's such a thing as loyalty, you know."

"These are uneasy times," Kevin said softly. "More than ever, we must be careful where we give our loyalty."

"That's an odd thing to say."

"I give up," Kevin said in disgust. "You won't believe me. Do one thing: read the paper. Watch the black box on the front page where the accidents and fatalities are totaled. See how the rate has climbed. Look at the business page and notice how retail sales have slumped. Then see if you can justify your loyalty. Maybe the people who are making these things are loyal, honest citizens. But they're murdering their country just as certainly as if they were traitors. And it's only been a week. What will it be like in a month?

"Maybe it will make you wonder if these things were invented behind the Iron Curtain."

He clicked the Silencer as he dropped it into the open purse, stuck it in her hand, and walked briskly away.

He didn't look back.

For the first time in more than a week, Kevin went to bed without a Silencer under his pillow. He felt like a heroin addict in the worst stages of withdrawal.

Cars turned the corner and splashed their headlights across the ceiling. Kevin stared at them, trying to blank his mind to the noise, but his body was taut, his arms rigid at his sides, his fists clenched, his mind a sea, stormy with speculation. . . .

His sleep, when he finally dropped off, was nervous. It was the new dream in which he tried to run away from something terrible and unknown. And he fought to run, but it was a nightmare slowness through the silence with faceless

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terror lurking at his shoulder, hand outstretched. . . .

He woke to silence—the complete tomb-silence of the slim, black cases. He breathed deeply for a moment, relaxing, thinking that he must have turned on the Silencer after all when the torment grew too great. And then he knew that he hadn't surrendered.

He spun sideways in the double bed, rolling toward the wall. Something where he had lain made the bed vibrate.

From his knees he jackknifed to the floor at the foot of the bed. The room was too dark; someone had pulled the shades. He dashed for the light switch by the door. At the corner of the bed, his right elbow, raised protectively, sank into something yielding. It fell away.

All in silence and night. It was indescribably frightening.

Kevin lunged for the light switch, missed, and spun to protect himself. Something hit his head lightly. He swung a roundhouse right and felt the fist smash into something resilient, like cartilage. He threw a vicious left that missed and a short right that connected again and a sneak left, and then there was nothing to hit at.

His hand slid hastily along the wall, but before there was light, sound returned, deafening, violent.

The blue fixture on the ceiling sprang into life.

He was alone in the room.

Dazedly he brushed the back of his hand across his eyes and looked again. The bed was mussed, but that was all.

Hallucinations? Silent but solid? Solid enough. The knuckles on his right hand were split and bleeding.

There had been someone in the room with him. Someone with a Silencer. The shade on the west window flapped. The window was up as far as it would go.

Kevin looked out, but there was no one on the porch roof. He could be lurking underneath, but Kevin felt no impulse to go looking for him. One such encounter a night was sufficient.

More than likely, it was a sneak thief after valuables. He wouldn't be coming back; he'd try easier places.

As Kevin put a piece of tape on his knuckles, he remembered how the bed had vibrated just after he had rolled toward the wall. He shivered.

He shut both windows and locked them and began stacking chairs into a precarious heap under them. He stopped suddenly. It was useless. Locks were no good against someone with a Silencer. He could break a dozen windows with impunity and stumble over all the chairs in the room without making a sound.

Kevin realized with a tight feeling of horror that the only protection against someone with a Silencer was a locked bank vault with a twenty-four hour guard.

He straightened an armchair and sank down into it weakly, staring out the useless window toward the

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night-dark sky. Five minutes later, he slipped into a tan sport shirt and a pair of brown, gabardine slacks, tossed some other clothing into a fiberglass suitcase, picked up his portable typewriter, and crept through the house and down the stairs to the kitchen.

It was after he had knocked over the teakettle that he thought of turning on his Silencer. While he was searching, he grew conscious that someone was standing in the doorway. He whirled apprehensively. It was Mrs. Waterman, her long, braided gray hair down her back, her face suspicious.

Kevin squeezed off the Silencer.

". . . do you think you're doing?" she asked.

"Moving downtown for a few days," he said apologetically. "I wanted to borrow a couple of things before I left."

"At three o'clock in the morning?"

Mrs. Waterman had always been certain there was something unnatural about a man who "worked" at home. "You know writers," Kevin said easily. "Creatures of impulse. I intended to leave some money."

"I should hope so," she said dourly. "What was it you intended to borrow?"

Kevin had considered a knife, but there was too much risk of getting sliced about the leg or abdomen. Instead, he had picked out a sturdy steel—a long, ridged knife sharpener with a wooden handle. Beside it on the drainboard was a flashlight. Kevin extracted two twenties from his billfold and held them out. "That pays me up for two weeks. I'll bring these things back when I've finished with them."

Her hands closed tightly around the bills before she said, "What you want them for?"

In one hand Kevin gathered up his suitcase and typewriter. The other held the flashlight and steel. "You know writers," he said brightly. "Notional." He stopped at the front door and looked back. "Besides, Mrs. Waterman, there are prowlers about."

He was out the door before her wail of anguish could reach him. He walked warily, inspecting the shadows, until he reached his car, parked at the curb as a target for birds and aphids. He flashed the light into front and back seats, tossed in his luggage, slipped under the wheel, and locked the doors.

He drove downtown by way of Sixth Street Trafficway, creeping across the infrequent intersections, watching the rearview mirror. There was little traffic, and no car seemed to stay behind him. He turned the car into the underground garage opposite Municipal Auditorium, stirred an attendant into awareness by walking into the glass booth and kicking his chair, and handed his luggage to a bellhop from the tunnel-connected hotel.

He kept the steel and flashlight in his hands. The boy glanced at them nervously. "Ask me no questions, boy," Kevin said grimly.

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The boy put down the suitcase and the typewriter, pressed his blouse pocket, and said, "Sir?"

"Never mind," Kevin snarled. "Carry on!"

To the room clerk he said, "I want a room with no outside windows. Failing that, I want one on the tenth floor or above and at least twenty feet from the nearest fire escape."

The clerk stared at him as if the thought Kevin were crazy.

Before he settled down in his claustrophic cubicle—unused, he had a suspicion, since the era of McKinley—he locked the door and pulled a solid bureau in front of it. As an added precaution, he worked out an ingenious arrangement of strings that would tug his leg out of bed if the door was opened.

It wasn't that he was timid. He was scared.

The walls of the office were chiefly bookcases, and the books in them had the well-thumbed look of textbooks or reference works. Beyond that it was unpretentious and small and cluttered.

"Sure you weren't followed?" Pryor asked anxiously.

"As sure as I am of anything," Kevin said. "I played hide-and-seek in Jones's until one of the elevator operators left to call the manager. Then I took a cab. If I was followed, they work in teams. I take it, then, that you believe me."

"Why not?"

"I really might be crazy, you know."

"So might we all. I'll believe anything about the people who made that thing." He glared at the slim, black case; his bandaged hands twitched. "Except this Iron Curtain business."

"Who else?"

"Don't know," Pryor said thoughtfully. "Not a hint of a hunch. If it's the Soviets, God help us all, because—well, a technology that could make this—"

"Accidental discovery?" Kevin suggested.

"Could be. Doesn't feel right, though. Not the way their minds work. Ours either. Too damn' subtle. Awry, somehow."

"You pays your money and you takes your choice," Kevin pointed out. "There's only two—the Russians or some honest but mad scientist. Otherwise, why the secrecy?"

Pryor waved his hands helplessly. "You're right, you're right." He brooded over the Silencer on his desk. "What made the bed vibrate?" he wondered.

Kevin shuddered. "I'm not sure I want to know."

"Why you?" Pryor asked, looking up. "What do you know?"

"Nothing."

"Maybe the girl—? You've given up on her?"

"No to both questions," Kevin said quickly. "I'm letting her soften up." He smiled reminiscently. "I've got a hunch—"

"Those hunches!" Pryor exclaim-

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ed. "Well, I don't care how you get the information."

"I think she's real soft underneath," Kevin went on, undisturbed. "That's why she acts hard—to cover up. When I break through the shell, she's going to tell all."

"I can't wait. Fifty thousand a day," he mused. "Who delivers them?"

"Who? But how do you backtrack a truck? If I were doing it, I'd rent trucks, run the shipments at night, and take back the trucks to the agency until next time I needed them."

"Tackle it both ways. I'll get volunteers to watch a shop twenty-four hours a day. You tour the agencies."

Kevin nodded. "The proceeds have to be picked up."

"Salesgirls could deposit it. Or someone could enter as a customer. Fifteen thousand bucks in twenties, tens, and fives wouldn't bulge too obviously if stowed strategically. But we can watch. Maybe you can learn that from the girl, too."

"Don't laugh!" Kevin warned. "You're speaking of the woman I love. Before we're through, she may be our greatest asset."

"Or somebody's," Pryor agreed gloomily. He glared at the Silencer. "For all we know it's a time bomb waiting to go off."

"It couldn't be much more deadly. At the present accident rate, the cities will be depopulated in a few years. That doesn't even consider the economic effect. By the *Times*, retail sales are off another ten per cent. I never thought I'd weep for the hucksters."

"You aren't weeping for the hucksters. You're weeping for your civilization."

"Haven't you discovered anything?" Kevin demanded.

"Sure," Pryor said heavily. "A little black box, four inches by three by one-half, emits any frequency of sound between the aural limits of 15 to 23,000 cycles per second, any intensity, any wave form, any phase. Contained within it is an instantaneous sound analyzer which picks up outside noise from the perimeter of the silence zone by some kind of self-contained radar or what-have-you. The sibilance there—the Shhhh!—is an area of inperfect cancellation. All this, you understand, from a little black box we can't peep into. My own personal theory," he said bitterly, "is that they are only three-dimensional projections of four-dimensional laboratories occupying the equivalent of the Empire State Building."

"You still can't open it?"

"Oh, we can open them. They're tough, but we can do it. We opened the thirty-third one an hour ago in a bath of liquid helium. The tank blew up and put two good men in the hospital."

"Anyone who gets curious about them," Kevin said, getting up with a baffled look. "They're almost—consciously hostile. And I rushed wildly to buy one—"

"Greek gift," said Pryor. "Be

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careful, now. Don't rush blindly into anything."

There was a sign framed on the wall behind Pryor's desk. Kevin read it and grinned wryly. It was good advice:

BEFORE YOU LOUSE SOMETHING UP — THIMK

Cincinnati, June 24. (AP)—

In a daring, daylight raid made possible by the newest electronic marvel and the oldest human brutality, five bandits shot down 29 persons and escaped with more than one million dollars from this city's First National Bank this morning.

A small, black case known as a Silencer which appeared on the market only eleven days ago provided the most bizarre element in a scene of terror, confusion, and bloodshed unrivaled since Kansas City's Union Station Massacre. Thirteen persons died without a sound and 16 persons were wounded, five of whom remain on the critically injured list.

The five bandits entered the bank half an hour after it opened this morning. One of them stopped at the door and lit a cigarette. The other four moved to different parts of the room. Only later did bank patrons remember seeing them drop something in wastebaskets or slip something into a desk.

But everyone saw what happened next. The five bandits drew automatics, and the four at the counters drew Silencers out of their pockets and tossed them among the bank employees. They motioned the tellers back from the windows. One teller hesitated. He died with a bullet hole in his forehead.

Near the door, a guard reached for his gun. He was dead before he touched it. Within the next minute, twenty-seven others were hit by bullets.

Working as if there were no reason to hurry, the bandits scooped bills out of cash drawers into linen sacks they removed from under their coats, looted the vault, and escaped without pursuit. Thirteen minutes after the bandits fled, the alarm was sounded. It took that long to clear an area of Silencers.

Mrs. Ivy Butler, who escaped with only flesh wounds from flying marble chips, said after help arrived: "It was the most terrible experience I have ever known. Not so much the people —that was bad enough—but the way they died, without a sound, like some new kind of animated dolls that have learned to bleed. . . ."

Chicago, June 25, (AP)—

Bandits stole $213,719 from the Midwestern Loan Office this afternoon, the eighth major daylight theft in the last two days, bringing the total loss to more than five million dollars.

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Police, hard pressed by the demands of the worsening traffic situation, are asking the sheriff's office to deputize armed guards for the city's principal financial institutions. . . .

San Francisco, June 26, (AP)
—*Two banks, separated by a distance of three miles, were burglarized last night for almost two million dollars when safecrackers, under mantles of silence, wrecked the insides of the banks while blowing open the vaults.*

No one heard a sound. . . .

Washington, June 28. (AP)
—*The alarming rise in the nation's crime rate was blamed this morning on illicit use of the new electronic miracle, the Silencer, by J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.*

"The Silencer is the perfect criminal tool," he told reporters in response to a rising public clamor over the wave of lawbreaking which has brought the nation's financial existence closer to the brink than the Great Depression. "Robbery and burglary rates have increased twenty times over the last few days. Other crimes have been crowded off the front page, but their incidence is just as terrible: purse snatching, auto theft, assault, rape, murder. . . ."

No police force can handle a crime wave of this proportion, Mr. Hoover said. He called upon every citizen to forego the use of the Silencer.

"No honest man should be afraid of noise," he said earnestly. "But it is the criminal's greatest enemy. . . ."

Omaha, Neb., June 29. (AP)
—*In spite of a signed confession in the hands of the police, Mrs. Elmo Pike pleaded not guilty this morning to the murder of her husband. All Omaha is waiting for the beginning of the trial which has already received headlines nationwide as "The Silencer Murder Case."*

It began 16 days ago, Mrs. Pike told police officers who booked her last Saturday evening. Elmo Pike had a different story. For him it began twenty years before.

According to neighbors and friends, Mrs. Pike had been talking to her husband for every waking hour of every one of those twenty years. Elmo, it is presumed, was tuning out as much as possible, with an occasional "Yeah" or "Uh-huh" to show he was listening.

Sixteen days ago Silencers went on sale in Omaha. The next day Elmo bought one. Then he made his fatal mistake: he took it home.

Elmo Pike had always enjoyed the sounds he heard in public; it was only the ones at home that annoyed him. He fell into

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a habit of turning on his Silencer as he crossed his threshold.

Elmo made his second mistake: he forgot to watch Mrs. Pike's lips.

Last Saturday night Elmo Pike looked into his wife's right eye. It was sighting down the barrel of his automatic shotgun. Elmo Pike never heard the shot that killed him.

It is understood that Mrs. Pike will plead justifiable homicide.

(Feature story in the *Kansas City Star,* June 29, bylined: Kevin Gregg)

I talked last night with the czar of the Midwestern underworld. I thought he would be delighted with the increase in crime over the last two weeks.

He wasn't. . . .

Rocco's face was blunt and pockmarked and impassive. It didn't change as Kevin said, "I imagine you know better than most of us what has happened in this city—"

"I read the papers."

"You read this then: sixteen kidnappings in the last seven days, thirteen children, two men, one woman. Five of them returned alive. Murder up a thousand per cent, burglary ten times that."

"What makes you think I'd have anything to do with that?"

Kevin glanced around the vast, sunken living room with its fabulous furnishings. The new split-level ranchhouse had cost Rocco almost a quarter of a million dollars. "You didn't get this being a good boy."

"Nobody gets this being a good boy. I didn't let you come into my home to make insinuations and rake up a lot of old stories. You were vouched for by some people I know. If you've got something worth saying, spit it out!"

"I wanted to know," Kevin said icily, "if you know what you're doing, if you know what's happening outside. You're killing society. How long do you think it can survive this deadly, silent attack—?"

"Shut up!" Rocco leaned forward, his face working as if it were trying to break through a mask. "You think I done this? You're crazy! It ruins me. I ain't slept for three nights!" He held out his right hand; a tremor shook it. "I ain't done that since I was in the army. Understand? Nothing I got is safe. Not my house or my family or the money I've got in the bank or the collections. . . . What good is ten per cent of nothing?"

"Nothing?"

"Who's playing the slots, the pin balls? Who's laying down the bets? Nobody. This silence stuff is murder. Where is everybody? I'll tell you where they are: home, like me." He slipped his ringed hand into the pocket of his maroon smoking jacket; there was a gun in it, Kevin was sure. "I'll tell you what they're doing: trying to keep what they got. I got nothing to do with this crime wave. I should be so stupid; it's killing us.

"Look at those San Francisco jobs

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—banks blown to pieces trying to open a couple of vaults. Kidnapping, burglary? These ain't professionals. I'll tell you who's cutting our throat: it's people like you. It's. . . ."

. . . the amateur. That's who's responsible for the crime wave here and nationwide, said this crime boss. He should know.

He was scared. He couldn't be sure even of holding onto what he had.

Some amateur might sneak in tonight or tomorrow night, might kidnap his daughter or his son without a sound, might steal the $50,000 Van Gogh from above the mantelpiece, might even murder the Big Man himself.

He isn't sleeping any more. Even the armed guards he has around the house can't protect him.

Today the danger is the man next door—the one who has obeyed the law all these years because he was afraid he would be caught and punished if he broke it.

He isn't afraid any more. He's got a perfect defense against society, almost as good as the old, fairy-tale cloak of invisibility. He's got the Silencer.

You better watch for him. You won't be able to hear him come in.

The garage was big and oily and hot. It was also silent, although the vibration of several panel trucks indicated that their motors were running. As Kevin walked toward the office at the back, a mechanic slid out from under one of them and looked up. He was red-haired, and he had a smudge of grease across one freckled cheek.

The office furniture was battered and unlovely. The man in the oily coveralls was a good match for it. He pecked noiselessly at an ancient typewriter, unaware that Kevin had come in. Kevin waited at the counter.

A few minutes later, the typist rolled out the sheet of paper into greasy fingers, read it over painfully, shrugged, and stuffed it into an envelope. As he was running a thick tongue over the flap, he noticed Kevin. He got up and pulled a Silencer out of his breast pocket and squeezed it.

"What you want?" he growled.

"You must lose a lot of business that way."

"Anybody who can't wait don't want a truck very damn bad. What kind of truck you want?"

"What I want is information. I'm writing an article on the truck-rental business—you know, the economics, who uses it, best hours, the funny things that have happened. I'm negotiating with *Fortune* for it. If you can give me some useful information, I might mention your business in the story."

He wasn't impressed. "Go on."

If Kevin had been there on an honest search for facts, he would

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have given up then, and he'd have been right. To the general questions, the man answered little, offered nothing. Finally, Kevin asked casually, "Ever get any unusual requests?"

"Like what?"

"Well, do many people want trucks at night—in the last few weeks, say?"

The man didn't hesitate. "Naw."

"Had any large, repeated orders with pick-ups and returns at odd hours?"

"Naw."

Kevin studied the man's uncooperative face as if he were trying to think of another question. "Had many accidents here lately?"

"Some."

"More than usual?"

"Maybe."

"Ever think the Silencer might be responsible?"

"Who cares? I'm careful. Anybody who ain't, let him watch out for hisself. He don't have to be a mechanic."

"See what you mean. Thanks for your time."

As he turned and walked away, Kevin felt the man's eyes boring into his back. A few steps from the closed office door, Kevin snapped his fingers for the benefit of the mechanics and turned back as if he had forgotten something. Through the glass panel in the upper half of the door, he could see the man in the office talking into a telephone.

Kevin opened the door. On the counter a Silencer was lying. Only an indistinct murmur reached Kevin's ears. He eased the door shut and walked briskly out of the garage and across the street.

From the phone booth, Kevin watched the people at the soda counter and the solitary shopper wandering in rubber goods and said, "I think I've got something, Hugh."

"How you figure?" Pryor asked. "Thought you said he denied having any unusual requests."

"Right. That's it. The other seven places, they all had something odd about their business, a couple of customers who had to have trucks at peculiar times, big orders to brag about. All this guy wanted was rid of me."

"And he was calling the Silencer people?"

"I'll tell you what he said, even though I couldn't hear the words. He said, 'You told me I should let you know anybody comes around here asking questions. Well, I just had a guy, he was writing an article, he said, but he wanted to know about orders and that—'"

"Okay," Pryor admitted. "Maybe it happened. What are you going to do?"

"Watch. It's the Green Line Truck Rental Agency. Has a jagged insignia from the upper front to the lower rear. Have your men watch, too."

"Kevin!" Pryor hesitated. "Don't do anything foolish. If you're right, they're waiting for you. Before you louse something up. . . ."

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"I know," said Kevin.

The night came down softly, warmly, and almost silently. Kevin grew restless. Four mechanics left the building. The manager followed them. The garage looked dark and unoccupied. Kevin shrugged and moved cautiously to the rear of the building.

It was dark. There was no one around. Kevin turned on his Silencer and picked up a loose brick. He battered open the ill-fitting back door without a sound. He moved through the oily darkness warily, risking brief flashes of the pencil flashlight he had bought in the drugstore. The office door was locked. Kevin searched the workbenches and found a tire iron thin enough to slip between the jamb and the door. He pried; he felt something yield, and the door swung open.

Kevin hadn't suspected the manager of neatness; he had been right. The orders were jumbled together on a clip board. It took Kevin half an hour to leaf through them; then he had his proof. On five different occasions, the One-Trip Delivery Service had ordered three trucks. They had been picked up after midnight and returned before six.

The manager had lied.

The One-Trip Delivery Service wasn't listed in the telephone book. It had odd business habits. Why should a delivery service rent trucks? It was neither convenient nor economical.

Kevin replaced the clip board and the telephone book in the dust patterns from which he had taken them. He noticed the pink slip sticking out from under the desk blotter. Carefully, he pulled it free.

It was an order by the One-Trip Delivery Service for three panel trucks, dated June 30, 1955.

With a sudden, unreasonable terror, Kevin realized that June 30 was today. He glanced quickly at his watch. Yesterday, rather, by ten minutes.

They were coming tonight.

Kevin raised himself into the back of the truck, feeling the tire iron in his sleeve hit silently against the floor, and closed the rear doors carefully so that the rope slipped over the loose top. Then he leaned against the side in the stifling darkness and listened to his heart hammer in his chest.

He thought he had used up his recklessness ten years ago. Certainly, he had used up his luck. Yet here he was, throwing himself blindly into a situation potentially more dangerous than carrier duty off Okinawa.

Men do strange things, he thought, *and to understand them a person would have to know a life history from earliest childhood. Call it neurosis, and let it go.*

He clicked off his Silencer and rapped lightly on the truck floor. No noise. The truck was equipped with at least one Silencer of its own.

He told himself he should get out while there was still time, but he didn't move. A few seconds later,

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the truck rocked. Kevin threw himself forward toward the partition so that he would not be visible through the window.

His shoulder rammed into something yielding. A fist hit his right cheek, and a patter of light blows fell on his head and shoulders. Kevin leaned forward, his arm encircling his unseen assailant, and shook the tire iron out of his right sleeve into his hand.

He had it raised when he realized he was fighting a woman. She was writhing ineffectually now under his arm and shoulder; she felt small and slender and soft. Kevin dropped the tire iron, slipped his right hand down a rough sleeve and side until he found a thin wrist, drew it back until he had both wrists in his left hand.

When the cab light flicked on, he lifted her ungently into the bright rectangle, and almost let her get away in surprise.

Glaring up at him with angry, black eyes was the salesgirl from the Silencer shop. She was dressed in an old denim shirt and a pair of jeans. Oddly enough, it made her look even more feminine.

With a quick, backward thrust of her body, she pulled him forward into the light just before it flicked off. He fell over on her, trying to keep hold of her wrist. He felt her body heave and then relax, as if she had sighed.

What's she doing here? he thought wildly. He rolled over and patted her pockets. She writhed helplessly on the truck floor as he dug a slim flashlight out of a pants pocket, some car keys out of the other, a woman's billfold out of her hip pocket, and a Silencer out of a breast pocket.

He let loose her hands and risked a flash of the pencil light on the billfold. There was not much money in it—a few ones, a five, two tens—but an identification card gave her name as Sara Richardson. That was all he read before she began hammering on his head and shoulders once more.

This time he wrapped his arms around her, pinning her arms to her sides, lifted her, set her down on his lap. In the silent darkness, his lips sought hers, found them. She clenched them tightly together.

Kevin sighed and leaned back against the front partition of the car. A gentle vibration was transmitted through the truck floor as the motor was started. A little later the truck jiggled and bounced its way into the street.

They rode like that, the girl clasped in Kevin's arms, for what Kevin estimated at six hours. Dividing by three to take care of the relativity effect, Kevin arrived at two hours, which seemed about right for the round trip. Sara had sat stiffly on his lap at first, but eventually she relaxed against him. After a few experiments in which she discovered that escape was impossible, she allowed his arms to relax as well.

When the truck stopped, Kevin

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scuttled quickly to the rear. If the doors were going to be opened before he had a chance to sneak out, he was going to make a dash and trust in surprise to protect him. But the doors stayed shut.

He tried a quick peek through the rear window. No one behind. No light. He looked again, longer. No one. He was conscious that the girl was beside him, on her hands and knees. He saw her face dimly white in the darkness and frowned. He shrugged and pulled on the rope hanging over the top. The doors clicked open. He slipped out quickly, hesitated, turned toward the truck, and held up his arms to the girl. She swung down to the ground in them.

Kevin spun and ran toward the right, feeling gravel underfoot, stumbling over a railroad track, glanced beside him. He caught Sara as she fell, her moccasin wrenched from her foot as it caught between the ties; she was following him. On her feet again, she tried to run, but the gravel was too painful on her stocking foot. Kevin caught her up, carried her to the fringe of bushes.

On his stomach behind them, Kevin looked back. Lights came on behind the trucks revealing a common loading dock, dirty, nondescript. Black figures moved in front of the light. They opened the trucks' rear doors and backed them up against the dock.

Kevin shivered; it was half excitement, half the aftermath of terror. He clicked off his Silencer.

"What were you—?" he began, turning toward the girl.

She was gone.

After a few minutes of futile speculation, Kevin shrugged and worked his way around the periphery of the light until he was close to one end of the dock. On it were neat stacks of unmarked cardboard cartons. Three men were loading them into the trucks. A fourth man stood nearby, watching.

Kevin waited. Five minutes later he began feeling foolish. If this were all it had come to, his folly had been wasted. And yet, he realized, he was one step closer to the origin of the Silencers. They came from here. He could find out where that was—if not tonight, then in the morning.

He reconciled himself to a long wait.

He was planning how he would investigate the inside of the building between the time the trucks left and dawn—it was possible that this was the factory itself—when he noticed that the fourth man was gone from the dock.

Kevin's Silencer was on; it was impossible for him to have heard anything. But he whirled around. A dark figure was behind him, pointing a gun at him. It was an odd sort of gun like a Banker's Special with a flaring barrel, a blunderbuss pistol. It didn't jump or spit fire, but something hit Kevin a thunderous blow on all sides of the head simultaneously.

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It felt as if the night had fallen in on him.

He woke up surprised. He hadn't expected to wake up—not ever. The ridiculous blunderbuss gadget had impressed him with its efficiency.

He woke sitting. He was moving. He was in a car, moving through the night unsilenced. He was propped in a corner of the back seat.

Kevin slitted his eyes open; a car passed them going the other way, flashed its headlights through the car.

"Awake?" asked the redhead.

Kevin recognized him instantly. It was the mechanic who had been working under a truck at the Green Line garage.

"Hey, Glenn," the redhead called softly, "the sleeper's awake. We thought you might not make it," he explained.

"You ought to know," Kevin said grimly. "Where are we going?"

"Back to the city. We were going to hunt up a doctor, but I don't think you need one. We'll go straight to the boss."

Kevin sank back. The blow on his head, whatever it had been, had left no aftereffects, but there was no use making a break while the car was moving. He stared at the night rushing past and tried to concoct a good, safe plan of escape. He couldn't think of any.

There was no more doubt in his mind. These were Soviet agents, and he had to escape and tell the authorities what he knew. They hadn't tied his hands, but he had lost the tire iron—left it in the truck, he remembered now—and there were three of them, two in the front, the redhead in the back with him.

The man beside the driver swung around to face the rear. "What the devil were you doing out there, man?"

"None of your business," Kevin said harshly.

"You're wrong there, Gregg," the redhead said softly. Kevin decided it was the way he always talked. He was holding something in front of Kevin's face; he flicked a beam of light across it. Kevin stared incredulously at the plastic-enclosed card.

It said that Frank O'Leary was in the employ of the United States of America as an investigator for the F.B.I.

The Boss was a heavy-faced, middle-aged man with a faint, bulldog resemblance to J. Edgar Hoover. His name was Brooks. He had an office in the Federal Building; it was still occupied at 5 a.m.

Brooks was short, and he made the most of the command of his environment by leaning over Kevin from the front edge of his desk. Kevin felt trapped in the low, leather armchair with the desk lamp accidentally turned to let the light spill over him.

O'Leary lolled lazily in a matching leather davenport.

"You're a lucky man, Mr. Gregg," Brooks said slowly.

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"I've been told that before."

"We've lost four men on this case in the last week, Mr. Gregg. They died without a mark on them."

"Maybe the blunderbuss thing," O'Leary said lightly.

"You saw it, didn't you?" Kevin asked sharply. "You said your car lights flashed over us as you pulled around the corner."

"What do you expect from fifty feet? It looked like a pistol from where I was."

"You should thank O'Leary for saving your life," Brooks said. "It must have scared the man off. I'll take your word about the gun with the flaring muzzle. I just wish we had one."

"Thanks," said Kevin wrily. "You probably wouldn't know any more then than you know about the Silencer."

"What do you know about it?"

Kevin looked at Brooks steadily, frowning. "That they can't be analyzed because they destroy themselves. That if somebody doesn't stop them, they'll destroy the country. That—"

"That's enough." Brooks stuck his hands deep in his jacket pockets and leaned back. "That's too much. If everybody knew that much, it would be too late for anything."

"Why?"

"Panic. It would wreck us like that." Brooks snapped his fingers. It was a brittle, final sound in the morning stillness.

"Nuts!" Kevin said disgustedly. "All you have to do is get rid of the Silencers."

"Just how would you go about that, Mr. Gregg?"

"Lots of ways. Close up the shops, shut off the supply, confiscate all of them sold—"

"Outside of the illegality, how do you go about confiscating twenty million or more easily hidden little gadgets?"

"Damn the legality!" Kevin said fiercely. "When a man's drowning is no time to argue about who has the right to throw a life jacket."

"I might agree with you," Brooks said quietly. "My superiors would not, and they would probably be right. This country has lasted this long because it wasn't willing to sacrifice principles to expediency. Like you I get impatient, but afterwards, when things quiet down, I know that things weren't quite as bad as they seemed. Besides," his voice dropped to the level of practicality, "it wouldn't work. You couldn't find the damn things!"

"Details," Kevin said scornfully. "They were made to be worked out. Shut the shops up secretly, and buy the things back! Pay as much as you have to— Congress can raise taxes. For that matter, Congress can pass a new law—"

"No time," said O'Leary, who was staring at the ceiling, his hands clasped behind his head. "The country is rocking now. It's bad, Gregg. Worse than you know. In weeks, the problem will be solved, or there won't be any more U. S. of A."

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"And you still haven't got the Silencers away from the people to whom they are priceless," Brooks pointed out, "criminals, psychotics, neurotics, deficient personalities...."

Kevin winced. "Action is always better than inaction. We're soft now. The Russians can walk in almost any time."

"I'll tell you a secret, Mr. Gregg," Brooks said, leaning over the chair. "It isn't the Russians. I thought so, too, but I was wrong. We don't know who it is, but we know who it isn't."

"You're wrong! You must be wrong!"

"He ain't," O'Leary said. "You think we got troubles? You should see the troubles they got in the Kremlin—if there is any Kremlin by this time. Friday the 13th! The shops opened in Moscow, too. It may have been unlucky for us, but it was plain fatal for them."

"According to our latest reports —they're hard to get out these days —it's chaos behind the Iron Curtain." Brooks rubbed his heavy jaw wearily. "Think what the Silencers did to the Soviet system of government! For a few days it was a toss-up which would happen first: the Russian attack on the free world— they blamed us, you see—or the collapse of Communism. You can guess which won."

"You're just like the Safety Director and the secretary— You don't know what to do, either!" Kevin exclaimed.

"We know what to do. We just have our troubles doing it. We're trying to find out where these things are coming from. The Green Line lead is gone now—thanks to you. They'll find a new means of delivery."

"You know where they picked up the boxes. You can trace it from there if you know your business."

"We know our business, Mr. Gregg. We mind it, too. You'd think it'd be easy; it isn't. The trails close up. That loading dock was only a way station. We'll follow it up, but we won't get far. Time's growing short. What about that attack on you in your room? What had you done to sic them onto you?"

Kevin hesitated, glad now he hadn't mentioned the girl. If she was part of some mysterious conspiracy, the F.B.I. couldn't do anything about it. If she wasn't, he didn't want them worrying the girl. She was his. "I'd been watching one of the shops—Twelfth Street off Baltimore."

"Amateurs!" O'Leary said, not looking at Kevin.

Kevin flushed. "At least I'm not hogtied with red tape. If something needs doing, I can do it. Where is that way station? I was knocked out before I could identify it."

"Thank God for small favors," Brooks said gratefully. "I'm not going to tell you, Mr. Gregg. You've ruined a week's work for us. Go home. Stay there. And stay out of our affairs—"

"Nuts!" Kevin said rudely. "This

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is my affair. It's everybody's affair when his world is crumbling. I'm going to fight it—with my own weapon this time: a typewriter. I'm going to tell the people what's going on."

"I could stop you, Mr. Gregg," Brooks said wearily. "It's my duty. But I'm not going to, although it will probably mean my job. I've got a curious reluctance to lock up my friends when I can't touch my enemies. And maybe—just maybe—you might succeed where we would fail. But stay out of our hair!"

Kevin sat on the edge of the couch, his hands clasped between his legs as if he were cold, and stared across the room at a line drawing of Freud. "They won't print it," he said dully.

"Are you surprised, Mr. Gregg?" the doctor asked.

"I suppose not—Yes! Yes, I am! Damn it, why should they be so stupid?"

"Is it stupidity to recognize limitations and consequences?"

"It's stupidity," Kevin growled, "when people allow apparent limitations and immediate consequences to blind them to inevitable effects. We're cutting our own throats, silently."

"If so," Fleming observed calmly, "and I am not convinced that it is—is it not because the human race is basically insane? Otherwise the sanity of silence would not be dangerous. Is not that so?"

"I don't believe it."

"How are your dreams, Mr. Gregg?"

"I haven't had any," Kevin said, surprised. "I've been too busy."

"We always dream," the psychiatrist said gently. "Only sometimes we forget. That is when the censor is at work. This can be a danger sign."

"Why?"

"You have told me this wild story about intruders in your bedroom, about your friend who burns himself on these Silencers, about trucks in the night and a strange pistol that renders you unconscious, about talking confidentially with the F.B.I.—is it possible that these are the dreams which you have come to accept as reality?"

"You mean I may be psychotic?"

Fleming spread his hands wide. "I wish only to mention the possibility. There is a significant symbolic content and—"

Kevin told him what he could do with the symbolic content.

"Very well," Fleming said imperturbably. "We will proceed on the basis—"

Kevin was standing. "Not today, Doctor."

"You will return next week?"

"Sure."

Sure? Kevin paused at the elevator and wondered if he would be back next week. Every day events seemed to pick up speed. Where would he be next week?

Besides, it wasn't noise he was afraid of—not any more. It was silence.

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This time he didn't wait for her. He walked into the shop, across the beige carpet, and waited behind the blond counter, his back against the wall.

When she came through the doorway, he stepped in front of it, blocking her retreat.

She turned and gasped, one hand pressed to her breast. She recognized him; her hand dropped as color climbed angrily into her cheeks. He was unmoved, his arms folded across his chest.

"What were you doing in that truck?" he asked steadily. "You see I've given you a few days to think up a good answer."

"The same thing you were."

"How do you know what I was doing?"

"I've read some of your articles. You want to know where the Silencers come from. I got curious myself."

"Then you've done what I asked you to do?"

"You've got no right to ask me to do anything," she said coldly. "I won't try to silence you, because you'd just resort to violence. So say what you have to say and leave me alone."

"You're in the same boat with the rest of us, baby," Kevin said softly. "The Silencer may be convenient, but it can be even more dangerous. You can't get rid of me; you can't call for help. There's no defense against it. Strength is the master now, not society, not tradition."

"You wouldn't dare!" she said defiantly.

"You've got it wrong, baby. I wouldn't care. If I did, nothing could stop me. That's what I'm trying to say. That's what the Silencer has done to us."

"That's what we've done to ourselves."

"With help, baby. With help. What happened to you the other night?"

"I slipped away and took a bus back to town. You aren't suggesting I should have stayed with you, are you? After the way you treated me, I had no reason to trust you, after all."

"And I had still less reason to trust you," Kevin said ironically, "and have less." Quickly he told her what had happened to him since he had stopped her on the street. She looked incredulous.

"I don't believe you. That's a fantastic story. And even if it were true, I had nothing to do with warning anyone about you either time. I wouldn't have known who to warn."

"You think that's fantastic?" Kevin laughed mirthlessly. "Read this!" He handed her a clipping.

At the top, in pencil, was written: *K. C. Star,* July 3, 1955. "That's today!" she said. At the head of the column was a cut: ABOUT TOWN. Halfway down, an item was encircled:

Here's another story to go with the one about the flying saucer. It happened this morning

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in a downtown elevator, and our informant swears it is true.

The elevator was crowded. When it stopped, a tall man in the rear wanted off. He had to push past the people in front of him to reach the door. As he brushed past a little man in a cocoa-brown suit, something horrible happened.

The little man's ear fell off.

Everyone in the car stared down at it incredulously, but the man in the cocoa-brown was equal to the occasion. He stooped calmly, picked up the ear, stuck it back on, and walked out of the car.

Before anyone was sufficiently recovered to follow, the man with the detachable ear had disappeared. . . .

"Surely you don't believe that?" she said scornfully.

"I should. I was the one who phoned it in."

"You were there? Well—maybe he'd lost an ear. You wouldn't go around without one, would you? People wear false eyes, legs, arms, hands—why not false ears?"

"Why not?" Kevin shrugged. "Only I saw the side of the man's head. Where there should have been an auditory canal, there was only smooth skin. No ear hole."

"Maybe he was born—"

"Why find excuses? If the F.B.I. is right—and I don't think they would lie about it—it isn't the Russians. If it isn't the Russians, it's someone else. If it weren't so far-fetched, we'd have thought of them a long time ago—"

"Aliens," she whispered. "Beings from another world."

"Taking over. With the most insidious device imaginable. They're letting us conquer ourselves—with silence."

She shook her head helplessly from side to side. "I don't know, I don't know," she muttered, her eyes closed.

"You've got to help. There's no choice any more. You're either for humanity or—"

"What can I do? I don't know anything, I can't do anything—"

"Close up this place. Come with me."

"I can't. I need the money."

"By the time you get it, money won't be any good. Come on. We haven't much time left."

She turned toward him hesitantly. He caught her arm and drew her toward the door. She came slowly. Gradually her footsteps quickened. "I'm a fool," she said. "This can't be me, going away with a stranger. . . ."

The car was waiting at the curb. There was a bright pink parking ticket under the windshield wiper. Kevin crumpled it up and threw it away.

He helped her in, closed the door, locked it. He slid under the wheel and locked his door. Then he leaned toward her, his eyes intent. She pulled away, alarmed. "If this was a trick—"

"You'd be helpless anyway,"

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Kevin finished. "Get that through your head. Beside this town, hell is going to seem like a picnic. In a few days everything's going to break loose. Look!"

In front of them a car swung to the curb. A man hopped out of it and tossed a brick through the window of a jewelry store. He scooped diamond rings and watches into a sack. Silently. Within seconds he was back in the car as it pulled away.

"The police have stopped answering calls like that," Kevin said grimly. "They're too worried about the possibility of mob violence."

"Surely they can do something—"

"Day before yesterday the City Council passed an Anti-Silence ordinance with an emergency clause to put it into effect immediately. It's illegal to own a Silencer. But they've got nobody to enforce it. They haven't even got enough officers to close up the Silencer shops."

"I see," she said quietly. "Where are we going?"

"To your room first. We'll pick up anything you want to take with you—that will fit in one suitcase. Then to a safe place where—maybe—you can help us."

"Who's 'us'?"

"Some people who are concerned about the situation—and are trying to do something about it."

"What I can't understand," she said levelly, "is why you're doing this for me."

Kevin leaned closer. "I think you can help us. You might know something, have learned something, that you don't even suspect. And you'd never believe the real reason."

Her reddish-brown hair was two inches above her shoulders. He lifted it up with two fingers.

"What's the price?" she asked stiffly.

"I'm not buying you, Sara," he said unevenly. "Not the smallest part of you. Not unless it comes off."

He touched her ear, tugged at it, peered into it.

"You thought I might be one of—" she gasped.

"You can't trust anyone any more," Kevin said gloomily. "There are aliens among us."

Already the Institute was beginning to look like a fortress. Racks of guns lined the corridor walls; ammunition was piled beside them. Food was stacked under benches in the laboratories: canned food, packaged food, sacked food. . . . Five-gallon tins of gasoline were stored in the basement.

"Just insurance," Pryor explained. "Temporary. Sent my wife and kids to visit their grandmother in the country; most everybody else did the same. But if we have to—we can hold out here."

But research went on.

"Got the job through a want ad?" Pryor said sadly.

"I had an interview with a Mr. Harper about a month before the shop opened. He offered me fifty

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dollars a week plus a ten per cent commission on every Silencer I sold."

Kevin whistled softly.

"I never saw him after that. I'd take the money to the bank and deposit it to the account of L. J. Harper. Every few days there'd be a new stock of Silencers in the back room."

"What about Harper?" Kevin asked. "Anything strange about him?"

"No. He took pictures of me with a funny little camera. He had a spade-shaped beard and an accent. He spoke stiffly, like a foreigner."

"It figures," Kevin said. "That would make it easier to pass."

"But aliens," Sara said, shivering. "It's so—so—"

"Very reasonable, actually," Pryor said. "Other intelligent beings in the wide universe—bound to be. Some of them ahead of man in the conquest of space. If they discover Earth, why shouldn't they desire it? Taking the Solar System as a fair sample, Earth is a fantastically fair, fertile island in a vast ocean of sterility."

"Clever," Kevin mused, "letting us destroy ourselves. No risk deal. I'll bet they even got back their capital investment and made the Silencer somewhere in this country out of native materials."

"How long have they been here," Sara asked, "to know us so well?"

"A long time," said Pryor, stroking his double chin with a bandaged hand. "Previous attempts failed—can see them now: the world wars, for one—could have ended in real disaster and general disorganization. Knew us well then, but not well enough; didn't recognize our capacity for rising to the emergency, for being spurred by crises. Sometimes I think humanity is at its best in crises."

"Other inventions?" Sara asked. "Haven't they almost ruined us? The automobile, say—look at the toll of casualties it takes every year. And the ever-deadlier weapons—guns, gases, bacterial agents, the atomic bombs?"

"The blights that failed?" Kevin suggested with grim humor. "This one's different. It worked. It attacked society at its basic level—the level of coercion. No society can exist without it. Gandhi knew it: his passive resistance was a denial of government's ability to coerce its citizens. But the Silencers are even more effective; they make coercion impossible by eliminating sound, the primary medium of communication. If you can't communicate, you can't coerce."

"Like a flywheel," Pryor muttered, "with the governor removed, tearing itself to pieces in its own frenzy."

"So you're all giving up?" Sara asked defiantly.

"The preparations outside are the best answer to that," Pryor said wryly. "We intend to survive. Suicide, man will commit. But he won't let himself be killed without a struggle. Trouble is: everybody's so

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busy cutting his own throat he hasn't noticed that there's a tentacle holding the razor."

"Well, then, let's do something!"

"What's to do?" Pryor asked. "We haven't got one of those bell-muzzled guns to work on. Bet it works with supersonic vibrations. We've duplicated the Silencer—almost—with a room full of equipment, but—" He shrugged helplessly.

"Maybe you're working at the problem from the wrong end," Sara suggested. "What about the aliens?"

"Humanoid," Pryor said. "Deduce from that what you will: parallel evolution, an interstellar colonization by protomen in prehistoric times, the natural superiority of the humanoid shape, Arrhenius's spore theory. . . ."

"I keep wondering," Sara said absently, "why they don't have any ears."

"Evolution would be hard pressed to create an exact duplicate."

"Then how do they hear?" Sara demanded.

Kevin stared blankly at Pryor. "How *do* they hear?"

Pryor pursed his lips judiciously, but his eyes were alight. "Maybe they do hear—maybe their real hearing organs are in their chests. Bet they don't hear at all—not as we know it. That would explain their voices—deaf, eh?"

"But they must hear somehow," Sara objected.

"Not if they're telepathic," Pryor said triumphantly. "Don't need to hear—don't need ears. Suppose they developed from protozoa with a rudimentary telepathic sense—no more incredible than sight, eh? Or hearing? A beautiful survival characteristic. Never needed ears at all. Makes their analysis of our society—based as it is upon a sense they never had—even more astonishing, their invention of the Silencer even more spectacular."

"Fine, fine—they're a vastly superior race with a wonderful new talent, and we admire them beyond description," Kevin said gloomily, "but how do we keep them from wiping us out at will?"

"There's a way. We'll find it. A new sense isn't necessarily an overwhelming advantage; sometimes it can be a handicap. If we can only understand it—not having it—and manipulate it—not really understanding it—as the aliens understand and manipulate sound, then let the aliens beware! Let's take a look at our experimental set-up for the Hush-Hush Project."

Sara looked without comprehension at pressure tanks and Peeping Toms and Waldos while Pryor tried to explain them and what he was trying to do. She shook her head helplessly. The machinery was only a little less incomprehensible than the Silencer itself. She pointed to a maze of wires, transistors, and electronic components gathering dust in a corner. "What's that?"

"That?" Pryor chuckled. "That's a ghostmaker."

"What's a ghostmaker?"

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Kevin explained. Sara shook her head bewilderedly.

"You know," she said absently, "they must have a strange existence in their own world—the aliens, I mean. Telepathy instead of hearing. Do you suppose they have ways of broadcasting it, machines that record it or respond to telepathic commands—?"

Pryor clapped his hands together delightedly and then winced at the pain. "Joe!" he yelled. "Winnie! Put a Silencer in the pressure tank! Then get this ghostmaker checked and rolled as close to the tank as it will go. The hell with logic! We're going to try hunches from now on!"

The miniature parts and printed circuits were strewn along the entire top of a laboratory bench. Pryor studied them thoughtfully, turning over one and then another with the tip of a pencil. "You know," he said slowly, "had a doubt for a while that there might not be any aliens after all. We'd look damn silly, eh?"

"But now there's no doubt?" Sara asked.

Pryor's pencil indicated an anonymous capsule. "See this thing? Filled with thermite. Perfectly honest little bomb. The little gadget attached to it isn't; it's a kind of switch. As near as we can make out, it picks up thoughts. Try to open a Silencer while you're thinking of trying to open it—this gadget picks it up and sets off the thermite."

"Then the thing was foolproof," Kevin said. "No one could open one without thinking about it."

"Foolproof," Pryor agreed, "until we set the ghostmaker going. That blanketed the thing. Lovely little device, the ghostmaker."

"Then that proves it was made by aliens?" Sara asked.

"Well, no," Pryor said. "Somebody could invent that. The proof is less tangible. The components in this thing—nothing really novel among them. The Silencer is simple enough to make—the parts, the workmanship are familiar. I think you're right, Kevin—it was made right here in the U. S. But it's alien. Alien as hell!"

"You bewilder me!" Kevin complained.

"Don't mean to," Pryor said, frowning. "It's hard to pin down. Look at it this way: it's as if an adult knocked down a child's tower of blocks and rebuilt it. Unconsciously—even if he's concentrating on putting it back exactly as he found it—he does it a little neater, a little different. He can't tell the difference—his discrimination isn't good enough at that level. But the child can tell.

"My son Danny has looked up at me accusingly, said: 'Who knocked down my skyscraper?' And he sweeps away the imperfect imitation.

"Look here—here: this printed circuit, this connection. New. Perfectly logical. Inevitable, even. Why - didn't - somebody - think -

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of-it-before stuff. But not the way we do it—and if somebody thought of a better way, he wouldn't think of all the better ways and the different ways at once. It's—oh, I can't really explain it. It's just alien, that's all."

He forgot them as he became absorbed in the entrails of the Silencer, diagraming them on sheets of scratch paper—a modern augurer trying to determine the will of the gods and the fate of mankind. Kevin was about to say something, but Sara held a finger to her lips and beckoned with her head. They tiptoed away.

"That's certainly no place for an amateur!" Kevin said ruefully, as they appropriated Pryor's office.

Sara sat down in the chair, looking small, dainty, and determined. "Oh, I don't know. I think the amateurs have done a lot. You discovered the aliens—and even now the F.B.I. wouldn't believe it. The trouble with the professional is that fundamentally he and new ideas are uncongenial. He's so close to the problem that he's lost his sense of proportion. And the amateur's ignorance is his saving grace—he doesn't know enough to reject the ridiculous."

Kevin studied his hands. "I feel a little ridiculous—taking advantage of this sanctuary when I can't contribute anything."

"You've done more than anybody," Sara said vigorously. "And you still can help. Was there anything different about the man in the elevator—except for his detachable ear?"

"No," Kevin said thoughtfully. "I mean—I saw him from the side. I didn't recognized him or notice anything."

"Why was he on the elevator?"

Kevin shrugged. "Following me, I suppose."

"Why?"

"Because of my prying, my interference, I guess."

"Has it ever occurred to you," Sara asked slowly, "that the aliens have displayed a surprising knowledge of what you are doing and what you intend to do?"

"Why not," Kevin asked, "when they're telepathic?"

"Surely they don't have enough aliens to read everybody's every thought. Someone close to you may be an alien."

"Pryor?" Kevin exclaimed.

"Oh, no!" Sara said, and then, "but it wouldn't be a bad idea to have an ear inspection—"

"He had a beard," Kevin said suddenly.

"Who had a beard? The man in the elevator? Kevin—Mr. Harper had a beard!"

"Suppose their mouths are different," Kevin said slowly. "Ears can be glued on, but the only thing to do with a mouth is hide it. A creature that developed along telepathic lines—maybe it didn't have to hunt its food; maybe it lured it. It wouldn't have the mouth of a predator."

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"And you didn't notice this alien following you before?"

"No, but I'm no expert."

"Surely you'd have noticed the beard."

"Sure," Kevin said. He snapped his fingers suddenly; an awed expression swept across his face. "It was in the Professional—" He stopped and sprang off the desk.

"What's the matter?" Sara asked, alarmed.

"Nothing. Have to check something." He looked at his watch. "Be back in—oh, two, three hours."

He was almost running as he reached the door. Spinning into the corridor, he caught a glimpse of Sara reaching toward the telephone.

He forgot it immediately.

Southwest Trafficway was lined with wrecks. Evidently, the police couldn't keep up with them, shoved them to the side, left them there. Over the viaduct, there were gaps in the concrete and aluminum railings. Kevin drove cautiously, trying to miss the glittering patches of broken glass, the slick patches of oil, the dark stains of blood.

It was three in the afternoon. The streets were oddly deserted.

At Fourteenth Street, Kevin jammed on his brakes. A solitary jaywalker continued across the street blissfully unaware that death had hesitated behind him and passed by. After that, Kevin crept along at 10 miles per hour, but there were few people on the streets.

Maybe they've learned the joys of staying home, he thought. At 3 p.m., it's the shoppers who fill the downtown area. If no one wanted to buy anything, there wouldn't be any shoppers.

The logic of it was naggingly unsatisfactory. Over the downtown area hung an atmosphere of foreboding like the oppressive stillness before the thunderstorm.

For the first time in ten years, there were parking spaces on Grand. Kevin walked into the glass-and-marble lobby of the Professional Building. It was deserted.

He frowned and stopped in front of the elevator doors. There were five of them. They were closed. There was no starter.

Where was everybody?

He pressed the button. No response. He pressed again. He wasn't going to walk to the fourteenth floor. One of the elevator doors flew open. An operator ran out, her hair flying, her uniform torn, her eyes wild.

"Hey!" Kevin shouted after her. "I want to go up!"

The girl kept running. A second later, a door was yanked in beyond the elevators. A man came through silently, running with his mouth open as if he were panting. He was a big man with a red face and a white shirt from which the collar had been half torn away. His hair was dissheveled.

As he turned toward Kevin, his eyes brightening at the sight of the girl, Kevin saw the red, parallel lines raked across his face. He be-

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gan running happily. Kevin stuck out a foot. Before the man hit the floor, Kevin clubbed him on the back of the neck.

He hit soddenly, his head rolling. He didn't get up.

Kevin wondered if his neck was broken. He didn't care much. He got in the elevator and closed the door and pushed the lever at the side. The car lurched upward.

On fourteen, he propped the door open with a chair and tiptoed cautiously across the empty hall. The door was inset with frosted glass. Kevin hesitated outside it, listening for a sound, some sound, any sound. There was only silence. He turned the knob. The door opened. He walked into the deserted waiting room. His heart was beating thunderously.

An inner door opened beyond the unoccupied receptionist's desk. Doctor Fleming stepped into the room. "Ah, Mr. Gregg," he said, "you are early, are you not? Your appointment is not until Friday. But it is good you came, because I am leaving." His bearded lips smiled. "I thought you would come. I told my friends you would come. They did not believe me. It is like winning one of your bets, is that not so?"

"Pull on your ear, Doctor," Kevin said. "Pull hard."

"But why should I do that, Mr. Gregg?"

"Humor a patient, Doctor."

"Very well," the doctor said goodnaturedly. He pulled off his right ear. "There. Are you satisfied? Do you need more proof?" He pulled off his other ear. It was a horrible kind of strip tease.

Kevin felt himself withdrawing, his face curling with distaste, as the alien removed the wig covering his hairless baldness, pulled off his eyebrows and his beard. His face was a nightmare thing, egg-smooth and blunt. The mouth was a pale slit in the lower face.

How could he have thought it was human?

This had been the repository for his darkest secrets, for his innermost confidence. This had been a confessor, a father-image. This thing, completely alien, completely unsympathetic.

How many of these things had there been, masquerading as humans, passing on the streets, the subways, the elevators, the stores, spying, prying, analyzing the human race for its weaknesses, avoiding only the intimacies of undress and close friendship . . . ?

He was lifting the gun out of his pocket when the silence enveloped him. Something limber touched his hand, jerked the gun away. The silence went with it.

Moving away from him now was another of the disguised aliens. Kevin recognized him—the short, bearded man who had lost an ear in the elevator, the man in the cocoa-brown suit with the two-tone woven shoes who had walked the streets of the city enveloped in si-

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lence and lured the poor citizens to their doom. The Pied Piper.

The thing had his gun in its hand, wrapped around it bonelessly. Before Kevin could move, it was out of reach.

"It was foolish of you to come, but then you are a foolish people," said the Fleming-thing. "You are not really human. Thus we do not have compunctions about taking over—just as you had no compunctions about stealing this continent from those aboriginal members of your own race, the American Indian. Why did you come, Mr. Gregg, suspecting me, knowing that you could not surprise me if your suspicions were true?"

"I didn't thimk," Kevin said ruefully.

The alien didn't smile. *They are a humorless people,* Kevin thought. *Perhaps telepathy does that to them; can there be humor among telepaths?* "Living among us for so long, you don't mind the slaughter?"

"You would not make good pets. Besides, we are not a pet-keeping people. It is a kind of immaturity that needs the antics of lesser animals to amuse it. Don't disturb yourself over plans for escape, Mr. Gregg," he said politely. "We are telepathic, remember, and you cannot surprise us. We would only be forced to shoot you—early." He took a bell-barreled gun out of his pocket. "This time it will be fatal. How did you pierce my disguise?"

Kevin opened his mouth, but the Fleming-thing waved his gun impatiently. "Do not speak. There is not time. I see. Psychologists were obviously in the best position to analyze the human race—but no human thought of that. And we were such effective psychologists—but not too effective, of course. There is an early memory of the skill with which the Silencer was displayed. The beard—an unavoidable link—and the accident in the elevator. It is a wonder that it did not happen more often. And now the masquerade is over."

It was an uncomfortable sensation to stand there and have his brains picked. What was endurable privately and inefficiently was unbearable under other circumstances.

"It may amuse you to know—before you die—that the psychology of the Silencer was in a large measure derived from your analysis. To me you were the epitomized neurosis of human society. It should please you that it worked so well."

"You forget," Kevin said quietly, trying to conceal the desperation of his final intentions, "I am no longer neurotic."

"Harsh therapy, Mr. . . ." The Fleming-thing whirled, catlike. The other one lifted Kevin's automatic. Behind Kevin, the door banged open, throwing him forward into the room. The door hit the wall in a brittle crash of breaking glass.

Guns thundered behind him, in front of him, doing violence to the ears in the little room. A few weeks ago it would have shattered Kevin

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like the glass of the door. He only broke his stride and continued with an ash-tray stand in his hand.

He risked a glance behind. Two men were standing on either side of the doorway. Another was entering. Real men.

Fire spurted from a pistol in the hand of a redhead named Frank O'Leary.

At the side of the room, the alien was drooping like a wilted flower, the pistol falling from a smashed hand. Another bullet hit where a man's chest would have been, tossed the alien against the wall; it crumpled backwards.

Fleming had disappeared behind the glass-paneled door of his inner office. The metal ash-tray stand sent the glass splintering inward. In the office beyond, the Fleming-thing turned toward Kevin, a telephone handset held to his slit-mouth like a microphone, the blunderbuss pistol lifting in his hand, as he said, "We are discovered. . . ."

I know now why I could never speak with him on the phone, Kevin thought crazily. *He could talk but he couldn't hear. Who is he talking to?*

He threw the stand like a javelin. It hit the alien's hand, knocked the pistol away, and staggered the alien back toward the window. Kevin wasted a moment trying to open the door. Then he dived through the space where the glass panel had been—miraculously missing the daggerlike shards sticking up from the frame but picking up a dozen little cuts as he landed on his hands and rolled forward to his feet.

The alien was struggling with the window. As Kevin rose behind him, the alien got the window open and started through it. *Can they fly, too?* Kevin thought in desperation.

Then he knew that what the alien wanted was death. Suddenly it was important that he shouldn't die, that he should be taken alive. The aliens knew so much about humans; humans knew so little about the aliens.

He tackled him from behind, caught him by the snakelike waist, pulled him back into the room. In quick, surprising twists, the alien squirmed around. When a supple arm touched his neck, Kevin knew it was time to let loose.

He stood back, ready, studying the alien. It glanced from Kevin to the window to the gun on the floor. Kevin kicked the gun backwards, not daring to stoop for it.

"Stay back," O'Leary said softly from the door. "I'm going to pop him in the leg."

Out of the corner of his eye, Kevin saw O'Leary framed in the broken panel, aiming an automatic carefully. Just before the crash of the shot, the alien moved—swiftly—for the window.

Kevin was waiting for it. He moved in with a vicious left to the midsection—a blow even the telepathic alien couldn't dodge, off balance as he was. Something cracked

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and smashed under his fist before it sank deep. The alien swayed, his eyes blank.

Carefully, Kevin picked out the point of the jaw and followed through with a right from the shoulder. The alien's head twisted sharply. He went over backwards, limp.

"Man!" Kevin said prayerfully, turning to O'Leary. "I was never so glad to see anyone in my life. Do you make a practice of rescuing poor suckers who jump into horrible predicaments feet first?"

"Only you, son," O'Leary said, reaching through the panel to unlock the door. "But I take back what I said about amateurs—you showed us something that I don't even believe now I'm seeing it." He knelt beside the alien and tied its wrists tightly behind its back. He began inspecting its body.

"How the deuce did you know where I was going? Nobody followed me."

"Somebody phoned headquarters," O'Leary said absently, his face twisted as he stared at the alien's unhuman torso. A patch of skin was broken over what would have been the abdomen on a man; something black and metallic stuck through.

Kevin rubbed his fist. "Maybe that's part of a speaking aid."

"We got to the lobby just as you started up in the elevator. We waited until the arrow stopped and started after you. Fourteen flights of stairs delayed us a little."

"Somebody phoned you?" Kevin picked up belatedly. "Who?"

"Me," said an out-of-breath voice from the doorway.

It was Sara, panting. "Those stairs," she said, leaning bonelessly against the doorjamb. "I'll never be the same."

In two quick steps Kevin was beside her, his arm around her, holding her up. "I didn't want you mixed up in this. What do you mean by coming into the city by yourself!"

"I had to," she said, her dark eyes studying his face. "I wasn't sure the F.B.I. would cooperate. They thought I was crazy until I mentioned your name—then they acted sure of it."

Kevin smiled warily. "I don't know what I'd do without you. I'd hate to find out."

"If that means what I think it does," she said, wide-eyed, "you'll have to speak plainer, Mr. Gregg."

"Later. If we get through this alive."

"What do you mean by that, Gregg?" O'Leary asked him sharply.

"These are aliens, man. They came from another planet, probably another star. They aren't playing games. They didn't flood the world with Silencers just for fun. They want Earth. If we want to keep it, we'd better prepare ourselves for a long, bloody struggle."

"Don't let your imagination run wild," O'Leary said skeptically. "We're onto them now. They won't

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have a chance now we're watching for them."

"Maybe," Kevin conceded, "but I think the old free-and-easy days are over. From now on every new invention introduced into our society will have to pass inspection, every person will be suspect until he proves himself human. . . . I wonder why he was so anxious to tell someone that they were discovered. There must have been a human on the other end or a mechanical device for translating sound into thought—"

O'Leary had spun to the phone. A staccato report to Brooks used up two minutes while Kevin stooped for the bell-muzzled gun, looked at it curiously, and stuck it away. O'Leary picked up the alien who had called himself Fleming and tossed him over one shoulder. In the waiting room, the other two agents had wrapped up the remains of the other alien in a carpet. It had bled red.

They crossed to the elevator. Kevin moved the chair that had propped open the door. The door slid closed. The car lurched downward.

Nobody said anything. They listened to the little noises of people breathing and scuffling, the clatter and clang of the elevator. . . .

Then the silence enveloped them.

To Kevin it was like falling into a deep, dark grave, like sinking down through still, black depths that set nerve endings screaming for something to hear and knotted muscles for defense against the unseen.

The door opened noiselessly. The narrow lobby was beyond. Kevin stepped out and pantomimed a search through his clothing for a Silencer. He found his, clicked it; it didn't help. Even when he threw it away, the silence remained behind. The F.B.I. men looked helpless and bewildered.

O'Leary tossed his alien burden to one of his men and gestured a question. Kevin shrugged, had a thought, pulled a sheaf of copy paper out of his coat pocket, and scribbled a note: *Don't know reason; don't like it. Our headquarters: Central Research Lab. Will want to see aliens. We might learn something.*

O'Leary took the pencil and scribbled back: *Nuts! We're going to Fed. Building. You, too. Later maybe you can call in friends.*

May not have time, Kevin wrote furiously. *Don't think you realize seriousnes*

O'Leary pulled him away impatiently. He led the way toward the door.

The man Kevin had clubbed was still on the lobby floor. Kevin still didn't care.

O'Leary motioned his men into a dark sedan with the two aliens, the living and the dead. He slid behind the wheel of Kevin's old convertible, took the keys, started the motor, and headed north on Grand. The silence was complete.

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Kevin propped his sheaf of paper on the dashboard and wrote: *Silence is total. Let's get out of here!* He tried to put the paper on the windshield in front of O'Leary's eyes, but the F.B.I. man brushed it away.

Sara was tugging at Kevin's arm. She pointed out the right rear window. A shiny balloon was descending gently over the city. Only it didn't look quite right for a balloon. It looked too big, too solid. Finally it slid behind the buildings to the southeast and out of sight.

Kevin decided that it would land in the middle of the baseball park —if it was as big as he thought it was. . . .

(Taped eyewitness account)

We was sitting in the stands still —just a few of us account of the silence business. The Blues was behind three to one, but we was cheering because we had won the first game and it was the last of the ninth, a man on first, a man on third, and one out. . . .

It didn't make much noise, but all at once that was gone. There was a big, shiny balloon coming down from the sky. We saw it in the stands first and pointed. Then the pitcher looked up. For a minute there nobody moved; the players just wacthed the thing come down on 'em.

Then they scattered. All but the second baseman escaped. Didn't make much difference though, because I was sliding down a pillar in back. Nobody else came out of the park. . . .

(Comment)

This was the third sphere to land, apparently. Two others had already come down: one at Municipal Airport, the other at Penn Valley Park. Later, four more landed: Mt. Washington Cemetery, Swope Park, Victory Hills Golf Course, and Milburn Country Club.

It is estimated that each ship carried one thousand soldiers. A total of seven thousand in all, then, was assigned the task of conquering the city. With their advantages, weapons, and the aid of aliens already within the city, this was not particularly foolhardy. Anything more would have been impractical. The world situation demanded at least three million soldiers, and the logistics of interstellar travel made that a fantastic task. . . .

O'Leary had seen the shiny sphere, but he didn't stop. They had traveled a block already. It was only one block farther north to the Federal Building.

They didn't make it.

Ahead of them, the black sedan swerved suddenly. It climbed over the curb and smashed silently through a store front before it stopped.

Kevin jerked on the convertible's emergency brake. O'Leary turned toward him angrily. Kevin pointed up the street. Over the hill came a smooth, shiny thing like a stream-

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lined tank. On top of it was a trumpet-shaped thing revolving slowly. It reminded Kevin of the advertising cars that had been equipped with loudspeakers to annoy the residential districts.

On second thought, it reminded him of the gun with a barrel like a blunderbuss.

O'Leary shifted into reverse, released the brake, and gunned the car swiftly around the corner, and swung it back into the street headed south.

Five blocks away he pulled it to a stop. He looked questioningly at Kevin.

Evacuate city, Kevin wrote hastily. *Only hope.*

How? O'Leary asked with shoulders and eyebrows.

Kevin shrugged. *Every man for himself,* he wrote. *No time for organization. No communications. Organize resistance outside. Here we haven't got chance.*

Sara had been reading over his shoulder. She grabbed the pencil and wrote: *Skywriting?*

Good, Kevin scribbled. O'Leary pointed to Kevin and Sara, jerked his thumb south, and got out of the car. Kevin frowned questioningly: *Where?*

O'Leary tugged at his ears and pointed north. He trotted in that direction, his automatic in his hand, his head weaving cautiously like a hunter.

Good luck! Kevin framed with his lips as he slid into the driver's seat. He put the car in gear and let out the clutch. Sara moved over close to him.

People were streaming into the streets now. The stores and restaurants and hotels were emptying. The people stood on the sidewalks and stared at the sky. Far to the south, a silvery balloon was descending over Swope Park. It looked like something a child had lost.

People looked bewildered and afraid. Then panic struck. Some of them turned and ran crazily in all directions, aimlessly. Two men started a fight. Another grabbed the front of a girl's dress and ripped it away viciously.

At Fourteenth and Grand the car was doing forty. It was the best Kevin could do even by ignoring the stoplights. People were getting in cars now, filled with a sense of catastrophe. Kevin waved them south. The streets began to clear.

At Fourteenth he turned. It was a narrow one-way street, and he scraped fenders, silently, with a car speeding the wrong way. At Baltimore the street widened to four lanes. Kevin hit fifty. Five blocks later he reached the Trafficway and turned south again.

He was hitting sixty-five when he reached the viaduct. The Institute was only minutes away. Then he saw the sphere looming over the hill of Penn Valley Park.

Seconds later, a gleaming tank-thing with a loudspeaker revolving on top came around the corner. . . .

Panic spreads in mysterious ways.

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Even without speech, people were streaming south over the viaduct, up the hill, on foot, in cars. . . . Those walking and running toppled as if a giant scythe had cut their feet from under them. The orderly lanes of cars scattered like drops of water in smoking grease. They mowed bloody paths before they crashed into one another or a lamppost or a house.

And it was all silent, unreal somehow. They died in pantomime.

Kevin stood on the brake and spun the wheel madly. The car rocked over on two wheels. Silently. The thick stench of burning rubber drifted into the car. Sara was thrown violently against him.

The car hesitated, straightened, and they were headed north again. They were on the wrong side of the viaduct, dodging cars. Kevin twisted the car into an approachway and threaded it around tight turns and through narrow streets onto Southwest Boulevard.

As he turned under the railroad bridge at Twenty-Fourth, he felt a hammering blow against his head. Then it was gone.

The traffic was light. So far there was no sign of the aliens on this side of the city. But the silence was just as impenetrable.

They turned north on Seventh Street Trafficway. When they reached the top of the hill, Kevin turned left and sped east on Thirty-Ninth. Two minutes later they pulled up in front of the Institute.

Two trucks, piled high with equipment and stores, pulled away. Beside the driver in the cab of each one sat a man with a submachine gun. In the back were three men with rifles.

Five trucks were still being loaded. Pryor had his back toward them. He was gesturing wildly at two lab workers. They were doing their best to get a crate over the tailgate of the truck without dropping it. Pryor impatiently stepped in and shoved. It slid over and in.

Kevin and Sara ran up to the truck. Pryor turned. Strapped to his chest was something resembling a television picture tube. It glared at them whitely. Pryor's bandaged fingers moved on a keyboard beside the tube, like an accordion bass. Black letters printed themselves across the tube: *Never mind what happened. We're evacuating. How's it in town?*

Kevin looked grim: *Bad!* He made a gesture for a sphere, indicated it dropping, imitated the movement of a tank with something revolving overhead, and people toppling over. He pointed to his eye and then to Pryor questioningly: *Have you seen them?*

It was like a horrible game of charades. Not funny—desperate.

Pryor was good at it. *No, but had report. Where are they?*

Kevin swung a baseball bat, made like an airplane, and pretended he was an Indian scout staring out over the valley—the statue on the hill over Penn Valley Park. He shrugged to indicate there might be more.

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Pryor looked around at the Institute as if he would like to pack it up entire and take it along. He turned back, shrugged helplessly, and tapped out: *Okay. Let's get out of here before they catch up with us.*

They climbed over the tailboard, Kevin hoisting Sara and then Pryor. Their truck was the last. They jerked away from the curb. For a moment Pryor stood at the railing and stared back wistfully. Then he turned and dug out two rifles and a submachine gun.

Kevin appropriated the submachine gun. He had used one before, and it took an experienced hand. It pulled up sharply and to the right.

They wound west on Fortieth until they hit Rainbow Boulevard. The traffic was heavy there. Several wrecks had almost blocked the lanes; cars were lined up for miles. The people walking along the sidewalk were making better time.

The truck pushed its way across the street, shoving a car helplessly out of the line. Some of the pedestrians pleaded mutely for places in the truck. A few of them held up children.

Sara reached for a two-year-old girl, but Pryor pulled her back. His chubby face was drawn and tight as he punched out: *No room. Head west. Get out of the city. Keep moving until you drop.*

He stood there, staring grimly down at them, one hand clutching the side of the truck, the other arm cradling the rifle. The pedestrians moved back and started on.

As the truck bulled across the street, a gang of men ran toward them—eight or nine of them, purposefully, organized. Kevin grimaced and fired a warning burst over their heads, feeling the gun jerk silently in his hands, get hot. He brought the muzzle down to cover them. Sullenly, they fell back.

A block past Rainbow, they turned south to Forty-Third, where the traffic was surprisingly light. They headed west easily until they reached Mission Road, turned south again, reached U. S. 50, and turned right once more. The sun was straight ahead of them, beaming brilliantly as though nothing had happened.

The silence was unbroken.

Pryor was leaning gray-faced against the side of the truck. Kevin indicated the sphere, and then clasped his hands questioningly over his ears: *The whole world?*

Without changing expression, Pryor tapped out: *Impossible.* Then he turned and stared gloomily over the tailgate once more.

It was a rout. Pure and simple. Without even half-trying the aliens had won the first battle and maybe the whole war. The silence had done it. Without sound, communication was impractical. Defense could not be coordinated. Instead of a well-organized city, it was a hysterical mass of individuals, each seeking his own salvation.

Kevin touched his pocket, drew

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out the blunderbuss pistol, and presented it to Pryor. Hugh's face lit up like a child who had just been given a new toy.

The houses had thinned out along the edges of the highway. The traffic wasn't bad; they were making a good twenty-five miles per hour.

But they had lost the protective camouflage of trees and houses. Kevin felt exposed. He scanned the sky, shading toward violet in the east now, but there were no silver balloons. The truck swayed and jolted; Kevin put an arm around Sara to steady her. She let herself sink back against him wearily.

Something went "Shhhh!" — long, drawn out. They were born, explosively, into the world of sound: the rumble of the truck, the long roar of traffic, the backfire of a motorcycle, the wail of a child, the scream of a jet flying low. . . .

Pryor clawed his way over the piled crates and hammered on the cab of the truck. "Pull over. On the shoulder. Stop here!" Five minutes later they had located a dirt side road that let the truck climb the low hill to the right.

The highway cut through below, a crowded ribbon as far as they could see, four lanes, all heading west away from the haunted city. There was no visible indication where the zone of silence, the hemisphere of death, began, but it was there, a poisonous, intangible curtain.

Pryor had no time to look at it. He was organizing, and in spite of his mad scurry order was being created out of confusion. "Break out the radio! Got to get in touch. Worldwide, I know, but some of smaller places should be unsilenced: army bases, air fields, towns. . . . Kevin—command the defense. Set up roadblock below. Get 'em off the road—maybe the weight station there. Ear test for everybody. Trustworthy men, recruit. Incompetents and children send west. When that's running smooth, mount guard—hills, the rest. Use rifles and pistols until we can round up some artillery.

"Sara—welfare. Chiefly food and lost children right now. Get the women organized. Well, what are you two waiting for—my blessing?

"Haven't you got that transmitter set up yet . . . ?"

The headlights stared down through the night at the brightness of the highway where the other lights converged. Out of caution, Kevin sat fifty feet away. He listened to the gentle throb of the car motor. It was an inefficient method of generating electricity—the gasoline truck was due again within the hour—but it would do until something more permanent could be arranged.

He leaned back gently against the parapet of earth and stones, careful not to disturb the five-inch bazooka propped to cover the patch of highway just this side of the darkness. But the highway was empty. The last, pitiful stragglers had come through two hours ago. There had

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been nothing since except the waiting and the imagining how it was in there.

Kevin shivered and lit a cigarette.

"Cold?" Rocco asked.

He sat behind, ready with the rockets. He wasn't such a bad guy, Kevin thought—not if you wanted a man who would obey orders without question, brutally if need be, and serve without complaint. It was Rocco's car there on the hill. His rocket launcher, too. He had got it at the Armory, he said.

"No. Wondering why they don't come out after us. Thinking maybe we're being outflanked."

"The set-up's good. They ain't getting through. Maybe they don't like to fight at night. Maybe they're busy."

"Yeah," Kevin said. "They'll be busy."

In the light from Rocco's cigarette, Kevin could see the racketeer's hands working redly against each other. They smoked in silence. Close to them a pebble moved under a foot. Kevin swung around, a pistol in his hand.

"It's me." Sara dropped breathlessly beside him. "I've got hot coffee." She put down a thermos bottle and three paper cups. "I made this the last stop so I could stay a few minutes."

The coffee was black and hot. Sara leaned back against Kevin. His arm came around her. She pulled it to her waist. "Anything happening?" she asked.

"Not yet," Kevin said. "Wait until morning. Then they'll blast us off here. We need air support. Maybe it won't help, but it'd make us feel better. We need anti-aircraft. We need artillery."

"You'll have them. Olathe Naval Air Base and Central Air Defense are still operational, and a battery is moving down from Leavenworth tonight. The General refused to send anything at first, but Hugh pointed out that there was no use holding the troops for orders from Washington. There won't be any orders out of Washington for a long time."

"Silent?"

"Also New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and every other major city of more than two hundred and fifty thousand population. Most of the foreign cities are gone, too, as far as we can learn. West Point is still holding out, but Annapolis is gone."

"Anything out of the city?"

"Until an hour ago, we were picking up International Code from Civil Defense headquarters in the police radio building. Then they went silent. The city was in the hands of the aliens; nobody left alive. Nothing moving except those tank things."

"What I can't get through my head," Rocco said softly, "is how they cut off all the sound. I got rid of my Silencer but it didn't help."

"Hugh says they were all turned on simultaneously by the aliens.

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Then they wouldn't turn off. There was a reinforcing effect that created a hemisphere of silence over the whole city. The sale created a perfect random distribution throughout the urban area."

"The right to silence," Kevin said grimly, "has its corollary: the right to be silenced. You know what today is? The thirteenth. It took the little, black boxes exactly one month to hush the long roar of the great, man-made beast—civilization."

"We did it ourselves," Sara said. "We complained so long about the noise—now we have to pay the penalty."

Kevin nodded. "Behind every silencer is a gun, and only a criminal has any need of one. Noise is society's watchdog: muzzle it at your own risk."

"Something below!" Rocco said sharply. He got up on his knees.

Sara moved aside. Kevin swung into place beside the bazooka. Where the dozen pair of headlights merged, something poked through the curtain of darkness. It was shiny and smooth. Above it, something revolved slowly.

"Ready," Rocky said tightly. He had lost a wife and two children inside the city. "Come a little farther," he pleaded. "Just a few more feet, baby!"

Fffwooom! The rocket blast flamed into the night. Kevin jerked away from the bazooka for a moment. Then he felt Rocco shoving home another projectile.

The first one exploded six feet in front of the tank. Kevin raised the launcher just a fraction and shot again. Rocco put in another rocket. It wasn't needed. The second one did the damage.

The front of the tank opened outward like a blossoming flower. Nothing moved, inside or out. The loudspeaker thing on top had frozen in place.

"That's for you, Florence," Rocco said softly. "The next one's for Tony."

"They'll think twice before they come out again," Kevin said wearily. "I think we've had the last excitement for tonight."

"I was afraid of the thing on top," Sara whispered.

"It's only got an effective range of a few hundred yards," Kevin said. "After all, their power isn't unlimited."

"Look!" Sara exclaimed. "There is something else."

Past the ruins of the alien tank, at a kind of shuffling run, came an oddly misshapen thing like a hunchback with dangling tails in front and behind.

Kevin raced down the hill in giant, careless leaps. When he reached the highway, the roadblock had stopped it. It was a man carrying a limp body on his shoulder. He dropped it wearily to the ground and slumped down beside the cars lined fender to fender.

When Kevin stopped beside him, he looked up and grinned. It was the F.B.I. man, O'Leary.

"I thought that tin can never

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would move," he panted. "I laid out there behind a hill for three hours waiting for those eggheads to make up their minds. I guess you wanted this, didn't you."

He stuck out a foot and stirred his discarded burden. It was the alien who had called himself Dr. Fleming.

The anti-aircraft emplacements marred the green lawns and the flower beds of the hilltop campus. The guns were restless in the autumn afternoon as they searched the sky for silver balloons. Nobody was sending up weather balloons any more. It made people too nervous, and it brought back memories of how they had been deceived.

It was always that—more self-deception than betrayal.

Down the hill the stadium was a ring from which the emerald was lost. The grass was trampled into sere, brown turf; dust climbed from the feet of the drilling squads.

There would be no more football for a long time.

Kevin walked quickly across the street and down the sidewalk past Fraser Hall to the old Physics building. He climbed the worn, stone steps and passed under the big clock into the dark halls.

Pryor was in the main lecture room supervising the assembly of some miniature electronic equipment. Girls bent over microscopes or soldered connections they could only see through jeweler's lenses.

"How go the wars?" he asked.

"Well enough," Kevin said. "As good as we can expect, I guess. We stopped them at Zarah. They retreated back to Mission. Casualties about even."

"Fine," Pryor said with satisfaction. "We can afford to lose more than they can. Callous but true. How are they as fighters?"

Kevin shrugged as though it were immaterial. "All right. Brave enough. Unimaginative."

"Exactly," Pryor agreed. "Imitative, eh? Learned their tactics from us. Stands to reason. When thoughts are shared—no premium on originality. Probably got the spaceships from some other race. The Silencer and the supersonic gun are only improvements on lines of research we had been following."

"So? It's a stalemate. We've got the small towns and the country. They've got the cities. Neither one of us can win."

"But better this way than turned around, eh?"

"I suppose."

"No false hopes, now," Pryor said. "Going to be a long war. But not as one-sided as it seemed at first. Don't want to go back to the cities anyway, for one, but I would like to drive out the aliens. Then we can start thinking about locating *them*."

"Drive them out?" Kevin asked. "How? They've neutralized every atomic bomb we've dropped, somehow, and the nerve gases and bacterial agents we've released don't seem to bother them."

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"Follow me," Pryor said conspiratorially. He led the way into a smaller room equipped as a laboratory. "One thing that will help. A defense against the supersonic. Guess what it is?"

Kevin shook his head helplessly.

"Our old friend, the Silencer, with its frequency range extended. Expensive to make, unfortunately. Can't turn them out in quantity, yet. But they'll help with the other."

"What other?"

"Remember the ghostmaker?"

Kevin nodded.

"Listen!" Pryor pulled a switch fastened onto a board. Wires trailed from it to various devices, and Kevin traced one pair through holes bored into the wall beside the door. "Feel anything?"

"Vaguely uncomfortable," Kevin said, squirming. "As though there were spiders crawling around inside my head."

"Open the door!"

Through the doorway came a distant scream from someone in mortal agony. Pryor pulled the switch. The screaming stopped.

"Recognize the voice? Another old friend, Dr. Fleming. You know, I'm glad I repaired his voice apparatus. He's been invaluable. You see, that isn't uncomfortable to him. It's torment."

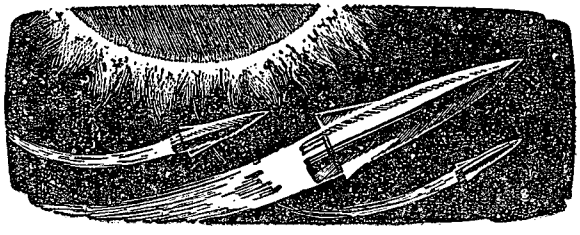
"What?"

"The ghostmaker. Going to drive the aliens out of the cities, send them running home. We'll slip them in, turn them on, run like the devil. When there's enough of them—no more aliens. Maybe they can develop a defense—a Silence-type device, for instance. Then, at least, we'll be on equal terms again. No communications for either of us."

"But what does it do?"

"It's a noisemaker. And the noise it makes is telepathic. Pure, telepathic noise. Either they leave or they're going to be the most neurotic bunch of aliens this world ever saw."

Kevin smiled slowly as he looked at pudgy little Hugh Pryor and suppressed a desire to hug him, to jump up and down. As Hugh said, it was going to be a long war. Kevin remembered what Hugh had said once before. "A new sense isn't necessarily an overwhelming advantage; sometimes it can be a handicap."



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behind the sputniks

by . . . Lester del Rey

A frank report on what the launching of the Russian Earth Satellite actually meant to a startled World.

THE sight of the Russian Sputnik and Putnik in the sky seems to have convinced a large section of the normally euphoric American people that we have, for the first time, fallen behind the Soviets in at least one field of basic research. This seems to be a shocking discovery.

It's particularly shocking because it has nothing to do with the facts!

In the first place, we've never had a monopoly on basic research or fundamental discoveries. Even the atom bomb, which is perhaps our most violently impressive achievement, is not built around an American discovery. The lead in basic research on atomic fission was taken by the Italian Fermi and the Germans Hahn and Meitner. It merely happened that the political climate was one which led to the discovery being given to us, for us to take the lead in evolving the applied or engineering technique to turn a basic idea into a working device. For that matter, Russia was ahead of us years ago in one of the great basic discoveries of science—the periodic table of the elements.

In the second place, Sputnik had nothing to do with any breakthrough in basic research. It does

Lester del Rey, author of the recently published ROCKETS THROUGH SPACE *(Winston, $3.95) and well known in the SF field, makes some challenging points in the present article, the first of a series dealing with the background and various other aspects of the Earth Satellite situation.*

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not and cannot prove anything about the relative standing of Soviet and American pure research.

As proof of the fact that the Russians required no tremendous new discovery of the theory of rocketry, I'd like to cite a fine description of the three-stage rocket that might have put up the first satellite. This appears on page 325 of the 1951 edition of Willy Ley's *Rockets, Missiles, and Space Travel.* It describes a three-stage rocket which is so designed that it will reach about 5 miles a second orbital velocity. The final stage has a payload of 200 pounds—not too much different from the 184 pound Sputnik. The carrier for this payload weighs 800 pounds, which combines with the payload to a thousand pounds; and this isn't too far from the weight of the carrier-plus-payload we termed Muttnik. The weight of the total three-stage rocket comes to about 85 metric tons, again not far from the estimates made of the Soviet rocket.

This wasn't a guess, but a carefully figured example of what should be built, with only the assumption that the fuels would be burned with about one-sixth higher exhaust velocity than was used in the wartime V-2. It was also only slightly larger than a rocket Dr. Wernher von Braun was already planning before the end of World War II as a practical design.

Was there anything lacking in the design which required any major leap in discovery to make it practical, however? After all, to build the atomic pile and bomb, we still had to do a good deal of work in such things as neutron cross sections, moderators that could be theoretically practical, etc. Maybe Ley's figures were too purely theoretical?

The simple fact is that they were not. The basic work had been done—it had been done since the publication of Hermann Oberth's book in 1923; and the breakthrough in technology to handle it had also been done.

We had fuels that were far from ideal but at least entirely practical before 1950. Hydrazine and nitric acid may not be a perfect combination, but it works. So do other combinations. And the achievement of 15% higher exhaust velocity than was attained with the alcohol-liquid oxygen of the V-2 was entirely practical; even without that, by increasing the ratio of the mass of fuel to the mass of the ship, it could have been made to work. It would be nice to have a radical new fuel, such as liquid fluorine, ozone, or one of the boranes. The theoretical work on these has already been done, and we'll have them some day. But we could manage without.

The biggest engineering difficulty in getting a liquid fueled rocket of any size to work had also been done. The problem of pumping vast quantities of liquids to the rocket motor—or motors—was a tough one; but it was solved in the V-2 with the hydrogen-peroxide

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turbine pump—a major breakthrough in engineering, incidentally, and not an American one.

There weren't any secrets left to the building of a rocket to put Sputnik up. The Russians couldn't beat us on the basic science, because the basic science lay neatly compiled between the pages of books in general circulation throughout the world.

But the fact remains that they beat us in an engineering feat, and they beat us badly. After several generations of conditioning to look to America as the place where things got done and machines got built, the world was rudely jolted with the fact that sometimes things didn't work that way. We were beaten in time, in efficiency, in size of achievement, and in prestige on the very grounds which we considered exclusively our own. We might as well face that fact, since the rest of the world has already accepted it.

The question of why this happened is not a simple one to answer. The too-facile answers of much of the daily press in this country simply don't hold water. It certainly wasn't a matter of having our secrets stolen, of captive German scientists, or of money. Those seem to be the popular explanations, but they don't fit the facts.

As to the stolen secrets, the fact is that there were none to be stolen. As I've pointed out, the basic facts were lying around for anyone to use at will. There might have been engineering secrets—that is, methods of doing the job—which could have been transferred. But there, we have shown rather conclusively that we haven't yet worked them all out. It would be rather difficult for the Russians to steal from us what we don't have, and if the Rosenbergs could do that, then we made a grave error in removing such remarkably clairvoyant geniuses! I'll accept the fact that they might have been adept enough as telepaths to pierce through the security restrictions of not one but several fields of research; but I can't yet see any evidence that Russians can train their spies in clairvoyance! It's still too darned difficult to steal secrets from us when we don't yet have them.

The captive German scientist theory is a more promising one, but that won't hold water, either. The truth is that we got most of the important men from Peënemunde. Dr. Wernher von Braun, who should know since he headed the project, maintains that the German scientists left for the Russians in this field didn't count for much. The ones who really knew what it was all about apparently made very certain that they'd be in a good position to be picked up by the Americans. They were more interested by then in going on with rocket research than in politics, and any European would have bet long odds on the fact that America was going to be the country where such

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rocket research could be made to pay off.

Undoubtedly, the Russians did obtain a number of men who had worked at Peënemunde, and acquired all the information they could from them. But since we had the top men, and since those men were eager and anxious to tell what they knew and to get to work on their beloved rockets again, this put all the chips on our side of the table. If there had been major secrets, we'd have achieved a clear-cut advantage.

Finally, there always remains the explanation of money. If something doesn't go right, dump some more money in! "It was only lack of funds that kept it from going right in the first place." This is what might be called the golden road to science. It's based on the old school problem: If one man can dig a well twelve feet deep in thirty-six hours, how long will it take thirty-six men? However, the answer doesn't quite work out, since only two men can work on the well at a time, anyhow—and sometimes they get in each other's way.

We have no way of knowing how much Russia spent on Sputnik. The obvious answer is, enough. But while it was probably a very large sum, it almost certainly was no amount that would stagger the mind. Russia's economy isn't so richly endowed yet that she could afford to divert any major portion of it from work on weapons and building to even the propaganda-rich achievements in space. Certainly we could match her easily in that field.

We've done fairly well already, as far as expense goes. The original appropriation for Project Vanguard of $10,000,000 was admittedly much too small, but that has since been swelled to a great deal more. And if we include the sums spent on missile work to account for Russia's success in the field, then our own missile spending runs up into a staggering figure. Maybe it isn't as much as it should have been. But there are still only so many men who can work on the well, and more money won't help, because it can only duplicate efforts.

The real question isn't why the Russians succeeded. There was no reason why they should not have succeeded, and no superlative effort was needed to bring them success.

The important question, and the difficult one, is why we didn't get there first.

We began working with the V-2 rocket right after the end of the war. For a little time, we were doing little but duplicate the work done at Peënemunde, naturally, since we had already been beaten by Germany in this field. (This seems to be overlooked completely nowadays, for some strange reason.) Then we began doing a little work of our own. We tested various fuels, and we even tried a two-stage rocket.

In February, 1949—almost nine

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years ago—we put a WAC Corporal on top of a modified V-2 and shot it up, firing the Corporal off as a second stage. The Corporal reached a peak altitude of 250 miles —well into the realm of true space. We had achieved the first brief success in reaching beyond our own atmosphere.

So far as I can determine, we then sat back and smiled in satisfaction. We'd done it, and that was that!

We still talked about getting out into space. Wernher von Braun drew up careful engineering plans for space stations and moon trips. They proved not to be wasted, because a national magazine boosted its circulation to a new high by publishing them; and Walt Disney was later able to make a series of cartoons based on them. But we had plenty of time to worry about actually doing such impractical things later.

Meantime, there were still such important jobs to be done as refining our powder-rocket, limited-range missiles.

The fact that the man who had the greatest practical experience with real rockets was spending his time going from the offices of a magazine to the movie lots of Hollywood would seem to indicate that there was no great urgency to our efforts to get a satellite up. We took it for granted that when it was done, we'd be the ones to do it—and we weren't in any hurry to get down to the nasty business of working through stages and failures to the achievement.

Ten years after we brought the V-2's and the V-2 designers over here, we were only a trifle ahead of what had been done at Peenemunde in actual practice.

Finally, Wernher von Braun and Dr. Fred Singer, along with some others, got together to discuss a project (known as Orbiter) for sending up a six-pound can to study space conditions; meantime, unknown to them and while they were interesting the Office of Naval Research in their plan, the American Rocket Society had suggested a similar plan to the National Science Foundation, and this was given the name of Project Vanguard. When von Braun's group learned of this, they decided to drop out in favor of the somewhat larger project.

So far, this was only another theoretical discussion. But then along came plans for the International Geophysical Year. This country learned that Russia was going to propose sending up satellites for a study of space as part of this, and we hastily announced our own plans. (This may not sound like a gracious way of putting it, but it's as close to the truth as I can determine. We seem to have been a trifle behind the Russians all along, and running to catch up.) Naturally, this meant that Project Vanguard—fortuitously in existence as a project only because certain people wished fervently to get into space—was to have the green light.

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Somehow, in turning it into a real project, all the men connected with the original idea seemed to disappear quietly. Dr. Hagen was appointed to administer the project, and von Braun went back to Redstone and his officially-limited-range missile work.

We were still not too convinced that the Russians weren't bluffing, however. We felt pretty sure that the term "vanguard" was appropriate, and that we'd be the first up, even if we didn't make it until the end of the IGY in 1958. (The Russians had originally made some noises about fall of 1957, but nobody listened.* In June of 1957, they even published the radio frequencies they'd use in one of their magazines, but nobody noticed until after Sputnik was up.)

Project Vanguard had originally been designed as a minimum effort —the present six-inch sphere now to be used as a test was adequate for the original purpose. In fact, it was referred to in the papers as "Mouse"—*Minimum* Orbital Unmanned Satellite of Earth. Now the plans called for a twenty-inch sphere to weigh about twenty pounds, and the rocket to send it up began to look almost too minimal.

However, it was apparently too late to redesign things. A good deal of work was done in trying to get it to the point where it could deliver the goods, and the original appropriation had to be increased several times.

It could have been revamped still, and there were plenty of people connected with it who wanted a green light. But it was still officially only a pretty idea, apparently. Secretary Wilson gets the blame now for his attitude toward "basic research"—apparently meaning any research not immediately returning something useful—but the attitude was general. Nobody took the Russian claims seriously, particularly when they began boasting about sending up hundred pound satellites, and Project Vanguard remained the step-child of the missile work being done.

The wonder is that, with the attitude of the country toward any effort devoted to getting into space, we can even hope that we'll get a satellite of any kind up into the sky.

We could have done it first. We're not inferior *yet* (and I'll go into that some other time) to the Russians in science. We had the men. We had more than enough money available to build what we needed. We even had the rough plans. The only thing that was lacking was the vision and the will.

We wasted some five years at a minimum. Hence, it isn't too surprising that we now find ourselves a couple of years behind the Rus-

*The story was told at the December 1957 Annual Meeting of the American Rocket Society in New York, of how Professor Sedov, referred to in the European press as the "father of the sputnik," and other Russian scientists, had often hinted, the past two years, at their preoccupation with rocket fuels, etc., at meetings such as the annual International Astronautical Congress. Our reaction had been as Del Rey describes.
Editor

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sians and must rush about madly flinging anything we can up into the sky to show that we know space is up there!

However, in all fairness to the men who are now finally getting a chance to work on satellites, I think there is one point in which the Russians may well have had the advantage all along.

A rocket is a dreadfully complicated thing. The average science fiction picture of a rocket is simplified to the limit—to the limit of the ridiculous. Most of us think of a couple of tanks of liquids that are piped into a nozzle, where they burn and drive us ahead by recoil. Around that, there is a vague framework, and some kind of metal skin.

The truth is that rockets are more like submarines than anything else. They're infernally complicated, tricky gadgets. That fuel has to be pumped and metered just right. The rocket must be cooled, but the burning must proceed at as hot a level as possible to get the most exhaust velocity. There are countless lines of plumbing, valves, automatic gismos, steering devices, and gadgets to release one stage and start another. On top of that, there are all the complicated guiding "brains," necessarily designed to be light, yet to stand high acceleration. Once the rocket is fired, it must correct its own flight path, and it must go through a complicated path known as the "synergy" curve; it must rise up through the atmosphere as quickly as it can to conserve energy from the air friction, then must swing about and pick up orbital speed, and finally fire a shot to put it into something like a circle, instead of the original spiral.

This means that there are thousands and thousands of parts, ranging from huge pieces to delicate little coils. *Every single one of these must perform its job properly the first time it's used!* If it fails, there is no chance to adjust it and try again; that rocket is a waste.

These aren't mass-production machines, either. If we're going to learn and progress, each of the first rockets will have to be different. Some parts can be standardized, of course, but many cannot. It will be a long time—certainly not until the building of the space station with its supply ships—before we can logically begin to think of rockets as standardized, mass-produced things.

As a nation, we're largely geared to mass-production thinking. We have learned to work better at that than most other peoples. And in doing so, we've made a number of adjustments to the needs of mass production.

We don't have any great number of decade-skilled hand machinists in the sense that many European countries do. It doesn't pay to use them for mass-production. The problem there is to make a huge quantity of acceptable devices—with an inspection station to kick off the normal percentage of rejects.

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We use high speed machinery to toss out parts, and we assemble them by using assemblers who need know very little about machining. We build in little adjustments to take up the slack and the variation. It makes good sense, because true precision machining is a slow process, requiring fairly small runs. Dies, for instance, do wear; if a part depends on precision fit, it will fail as soon as the die has worn beyond a slight tolerance. We have made the world envy our production with this system.

But the world hasn't envied our *quality* nor our *flexibility* for a long time. Ask anyone who has taken a German car, an Italian sewing machine, or a foreign typewriter to pieces. Those parts *fit*! You can't put a Groma typewriter back out of alignment, because the type basket is machined to an absolute fit with the supports. You can't seem to make a Swedish Volvo car develop the normal squeaks and rattles. And you can't find the little roughness in feeding, so common to our machines, in a Necchi sewing machine.

In Europe—though to a diminishing extent in Western Europe—the fine hand craftsmanship of a master machinist is still available at a reasonable price. I've seen one of those men take a look at a broken part and file a new one out of raw stock by hand—and get a perfect fit. That comes only after years of such work. It also probably only comes when the material is worth more than the labor—unlike our system—and when the worker can't afford to have rejects. It takes a profound respect for metal and tools before a man can cut a worm gear by hand without botching it.

We don't think in techniques that require such work any more. When such a part seems to be indicated, an American designer will almost instinctively look for another way to do things, even if it means a trifle more weight, or a duplicate control to check the first one. (Weight, on a rocket, is a thing that compounds and recompounds itself to a fantastic degree.) Or else we think in terms of setting up some tremendously precise and horribly expensive machine to do the creating of the part—something that we're also not set up for when we're dealing with only a few parts.

Whether Russia herself had any great number of such master machinists, I don't pretend to know. Possibly. But she wouldn't have to have them. She has one of the best sources of supply in Europe. For years, Czechoslovakia has enjoyed about the top reputation in Europe for work of this sort. As only one example, some of the finest guns in the world were made there—and the best of those were largely handworked. From Czechoslovakia alone, more than enough such skilled workers could be hired.

Incidentally, to spike a rumor before it can be started, I don't mean slave labor. In anything like a rocket, where so many chances for sabotage exist, slave labor would

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be unthinkable. Anyhow, there are enough men who would give their eye teeth to work on such a project that I suspect no trouble would be experienced in getting all necessary labor.

Quite possibly, the one advantage Russia had in building the rockets was the very backwardness of some parts of her technology. The skills needed to build rockets may have more to do with the small shop in some ways than with the airplane factory as we know it. This, at least, would partially explain why the Russians seem to have had less failures with their firings than might have been expected. Absolute precision workmanship would make a tremendous difference, obviously.

This, of course, neglects most of the factors that are being used to account for our being behind the Sputniks. (And it very much neglects the other school that says we're really not, because our weapons are still superior. At the moment, I'm more concerned with progress toward the future than I am toward the ability to eliminate the future.) Some of these factors may have some validity, though less than usually indicated.

There can be no doubt but what the general disrespect for scientists —the positive distrust of them, in fact—has hurt. No man can do his best work and no man will seek work where he is regarded as a potential spy or crackpot, and where it's customary to put men ignorant of a project over him to administer his work with progress charts that only get in his way.

Yet in many cases, that seems to be what the scientist and engineer must face in some government service.

There can be no question but what bitter rivalry between supposedly unified services will add greatly to the cost of work. Whether that nonsense can seriously delay developments is another matter, though the men best fitted to do the work are not always the same as the men best fitted to convince the proper committees that they should be granted funds for the work.

Above all, there can unfortunately be only misery in the thought that Russia is working harder at the job of producing future scientists and engineers than we are, and that her attention to the schooling of them has been a full-time project, while our best brains leave the colleges for other jobs all too often. The papers have finally caught up with this fact—reported elsewhere for the past 15 years. Once in a great while, we even see that Russia has been using science fiction magazines—of the old-style gadgetry, pro-technology type—to inculcate a love of science into the younger minds and convince others that science is not evil. It's a pity to see our own development turned against us this way, since we used to regard science fiction as something almost as purely American

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(or at least, Anglo-American) as would be the space-flights about which we dreamed.

These things all deserve a much fuller treatment, and I hope to go into them some other time. But I don't feel that they really offer any explanation of the fact that we find ourselves behind the Russian Sputniks instead of sending up a true Vanguard—a forerunner of space travel.

No, unfortunately, the explanation for that is much simpler. Russia beat us because she wanted to get a satellite out into space as soon as she possibly could. We fell behind—because we didn't care to try.

ADDENDUM:

Since the above was written, the first Vanguard attempt has ended in failure, to the serious harm of our prestige abroad. This should have been no surprise; the men working on it were obviously given too little time in which to achieve a crash delivery of a satellite in 1957.

Apparently, high circles in government have finally begun to want the satellite. But they haven't yet learned to treat spaceflight with any degree of serious respect, which is as necessary as desire. They seem to feel it's something that can be done on order by mere wishing to make it so.

Certainly they would never have tried such tactics had they been dealing with automobiles. No manager in Detroit would have given a moment's consideration to the idea that the 1959 models should be produced at once, merely because someone came out with an advanced model. In fact, when Citroën of France switched to "air" suspension in 1955, Detroit took time for a full study of the situation, and came out with the equivalent in 1958 models. We take it for granted that design and preliminary work must precede production in cars by at least two years.

Automobiles are something we do take seriously. Obviously, rockets are not in the same class.

Perhaps that explains why two pictures of objects circling the globe appeared in the same newspapers. One showed the Russian Sputnik in its orbit. The other showed a new model car about the size of the globe, with an artist's conventional flight trail out in space. This was a larger picture, and it announced a new car that had circled the globe ten times in a preliminary test before being released to the public. *That* represented serious engineering on our part....

LdR

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birthright

by . . . Margaret St. Clair

The problem was simple. Did they really have the right to refuse this child life—life in this weird Tomorrow?

"THE child's parents won't pay for it," said the surgeon. "They've got six children already, and they're always in the night clinics, getting one or another of their progeny's ailments shored up. The last thing they want is the care of another defective child."

"He's not defective," Nurse Peabody said warmly. "Outside of needing a heart operation, he's a fine baby. A normal child."

The surgeon raised his eyebrows. He had gray hair and a young, rosy, unlined face. "In the twenty years since I've been working in this hospital—I came here to work in 1960, a long time ago—I've seen a constant down-grading of the concepts of health and normality. Nowadays a child is considered normal if it hasn't got a strontium-induced bone cancer."

"But that's progress!" said Nurse Peabody. "That's why our outpatient clinics are open until ten, six nights a week—so people can have their ailments tended to and their deficiencies compensated for. We have a new concept of social responsibility. Would you deny them the right to live?"

"—This child has severe con-

Margaret St. Clair dedicated much of her early talent to the horror story. Then having acquired an enviable reputation in the field, she turned to Science Fiction, her stories reflecting freshness and originality, and an uncanny insight into the psychology of alien and also mutant life forms.

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genital diabetes, and a visual defect so bad we'll have to fit him with contact lenses while he's still in the cradle. I don't know anything about the right to live, theoretically. It's going to take constant medical effort just to keep him alive."

"That's not his fault! He's as good as anybody else."

"He's not. He's a human being, and he's entitled to the basic rights and privileges of human beings everywhere. But from a genetic standpoint, he's inferior. He's one of the growing group of people whose basic physical equipment is so inferior that he'll never really be able to enjoy life. With the best we can do for him, he'll still be half-sick. There won't be a day of his existence when he'll know what physical well-being means."

"Oh, and he'll have to be fitted with a hearing aid before he's forty. Both his father and his mother have atrophied otic nerves."

"That's not his fault."

"I didn't say it was." The surgeon smiled. "Dear Miss Peabody," he said, "your solicitude for your little charges does you credit." (Peabody was head of the hospital's nursery.) "I think it's misplaced. Besides, the child's parents won't pay for the surgery, and it's not included in their health insurance."

"It doesn't need to settle it. You know that the hospital has a special fund for extra-insurance emergency cases. All you have to do is to sign the requisition slip."

Morley sighed. After a moment, he shook his head. "I won't do it."

"He'll be dead within twenty-four hours if he isn't operated.—You refuse?"

"Yes. I do refuse. Patching up that child is like pouring water down a rat hole. Sorry."

Nurse Peabody left Morley's office and clumped her way down the corridor. She was annoyed, but not surprised. Morley was a brilliant surgeon, but he'd always had an inadequate sense of social responsibility. He was one of the old guard. Since he'd never been sick a day in his life himself, he had an exaggerated idea of the importance of physical "normality." She'd take the matter higher up.

On her way to see Swenson, the head surgeon, she stopped off in the nursery. All the babies were fine, and little Patrick, the child for whom she was concerning herself, was making a burbling noise in his crib. She looked at his chart and saw that it was nearly time for his next insulin injection. She'd speak to the nurse on duty about it, to make sure. What a dear baby he was! You'd never know from his eyes that he had a visual defect.

She clumped her way past Swenson's secretary and into his office. He was no more sympathetic than Dr. Morley had been.

"It's a risky operation," he said, when she had tactfully let him know what she wanted. "I'd prefer to employ the hospital's emergency fund in a case where there's more assurance of success.

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"Besides, we're not a big hospital. An operation like that means tying up a quarter of our facilities and a third of our operation personnel for almost twenty-four hours. Meantime we'd be turning away simple orthopedic cases, reducible hernias, and run-of-the-mill geriatric eye surgery, because we wouldn't have time for them."

"But—a case like little Patrick's is a challenge!"

"No. It's tilting at windmills."

"You sound like Dr. Morley."

"Perhaps I'm beginning to feel the way he does." Swenson smiled at her. Before she knew how it had happened, she was outside once more in the corridor.

As she swung along, she found she was near tears. She'd already gone as high in the hospital echelon as she dared. Higher, really—she knew Dr. Swenson thought it was officious of her. If she went any higher, she'd be jeopardizing her own professional future. It wasn't a nurse's place to tell a doctor what to do. And yet, how could she stand aside while little Patrick was deprived of his birthright, life? It wasn't as though Swenson or Morley were right!

She was getting near the pharmacy. Nobody was in the hall. She hesitated. Then, as lightly as she could, she entered the stock room. If she was caught, she could say she was looking for dusting powder for the babies, and hadn't wanted to bother anybody. She knew something about Dr. Ilopin, the director of Mt. Jordan Hospital, that not many other people did.

She had luck. She found the bottle she wanted without too much difficulty. Phenylalanine. She dumped a little of the stuff into a bit of paper she found in a pocket of her uniform, and folded it up. There. She only hoped the chemical wouldn't have a noticeable taste.

She was due to make her daily report to Ilopin at three. Only a few minutes to wait. She went back to the nursery, checked the babies' charts with particular attention to Patrick's, picked up a requisition form, and then clumped her way to Ilopin's private elevator. His office was at the top of the building, above even surgery.

She made her report. There had been trouble with the nursery ventilators, she thought parents were being permitted too much contact with their new-born offspring, the new formula had produced one or two cases of allergy. Ilopin listened. If any proof was needed—Nurse Peabody thought—that Swenson and Morley were wrong, Ilopin furnished it. Born with a constitutional inability to convert phenylalanine to tyrosine, he had been on a phenylalanine-free diet all his life. Yet despite his genetic deficiency, he was the head of Mt. Jordan Hospital and a highly intelligent man. That he had never married wasn't relevant.

She finished. She turned to go. "You look tired, doctor," she said. She hesitated. The hesitation was

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beautifully done. "Could I get you a cup of tea?" She knew Ilopin loved tea.

"Thank you. That's nice of you."

Trying not to seem excited, she bustled into the office kitchen. She boiled water, brewed tea, put cream and sugar and the teapot on a tray. At the last moment she dumped the phenylalanine into the pot.

Ilopin poured out the tea, adding sugar. Good. He wouldn't be so apt to notice if there were any peculiar taste. He drank.

Nurse Peabody had busied herself with changing the water on the flowers on a side table. After a moment, she looked up. An odd, glassy look had come over Dr. Ilopin's astute face.

"Dr. Ilopin," she said breathlessly, "I've got a requisition for an emergency operation I'd like you to sign."

"Yesh?"

"Right here." She handed the slip of paper to him.

"Speshial fund," he said wisely. "Whash' it for?"

"A delicate heart operation on one of the babies in my nursery."

"How del'cate?" He rubbed his forehead as if it hurt.

"Fairly delicate. But if it isn't done, the baby will die."

"Ohhhhh—all right." He signed.

She picked up the signed slip, and the tray. In the kitchen she carefully washed out the pot and cup. The chances were that Dr. Ilopin would remember nothing about it. When his phenylalanine-induced idiocy subsided, he'd think he'd signed the requisition in a fit of absent-mindedness.

She drew a deep breath as she closed his office door.

She waited until almost five before she went in to see Dr. Morley. She didn't dare wait any longer; little Patrick was already beginning to show signs of increasing cardiac insufficiency.

"Dr. Morley, I have a signed requisition from Dr. Ilopin authorizing the heart operation on Patrick Hechner." She managed to keep the triumph out of her voice.

"What?" He sounded jarred.

"Yes, doctor. Here." She handed him the slip.

"Well, I'll be—" he said after a moment. "H'um. I wonder—Well, go tell the head surgical nurse to come here. We'd better get ready."

Nurse Peabody nodded. "Yes, doctor." She wheeled her prosthetic appliance around. Her little jointless pad feet pedaling away vigorously within it—Ellen Peabody had been born without any body joints below those of her hips—she clumped along the corridor toward the surgery.

Her hip joints were burning like fire; she'd had to do an unusual amount of pedaling today. Never mind. She'd won his birthright for little Patrick. When she went off duty, she'd get more codeine from the pharmacy. Codeine was a wonderful help in getting through the night.

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judgment day

by . . . Lloyd Biggle

It was a long time before he realized that what he saw wasn't just pictures of what'd really happen.

IN GLENN CENTER that evening, everyone was talking about Lem Dyer. Lem heard some of the things they were saying, from the noisy crowd that gathered below his cell window. He heard that he was a harmless dreamer and a visionary, and he heard that he was a violent idiot. He heard that he was a kindly, gentle old man always ready to lend a neighbor a hand, and he heard that he was a vicious, shiftless criminal.

He tilted the battered old chair back against the cement-block wall and sat there in the dark, puffing slowly on his corn-cob pipe, and only half listening to the arguments, and the coarse shouts, and the jeers. "Shucks," he said to himself. "They don't mean nothin' by it."

And after a while he heard the sheriff's booming voice talking to the crowd, telling the men to go home, telling them they had nothing to worry about, and they might as well leave Lem Dyer alone with his conscience.

"He'll hang at sunrise, just as sure as there'll be a sunrise," Sheriff Darbson said. "Now go on home and get to bed. You don't want to oversleep, do you?"

We know next to nothing about Biggle except that he has a quiet wry humor and an ability which makes him one of the more interesting of the new writers. There is a promising tendency to turn a quizzical eye upon a Mad Tomorrow which prompts the prediction that here is anthology material. . . .

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There was more talk, and then the men drifted away and things got quiet. The sheriff came back in the jail and barred the front door, and Lem heard him talking to the deputies, allowing that Lem Dyer might or might not be the things people said he was, but he was sure an odd one.

"Going to hang in the morning," the sheriff said, "and he's sitting back there in his cell smoking his pipe just like he always used to do out in his shack, of an evening. To look at him you'd think nothing had happened—or was going to happen."

Lem chuckled softly to himself. The sheriff, he thought, was a good man. He'd gone out of his way to make Lem comfortable, and bring him little things like tobacco, and even a drink of whiskey now and then. And when Lem had thanked him, he'd said, "Hell, I've got to hang you. Isn't that punishment enough?"

Lem puffed contentedly on his pipe, and decided he should do something for the sheriff. But later on, after all this was over with.

He'd wanted to tell the sheriff how there wouldn't be any hanging, and he was wasting a lot of money building that scaffold and getting everything ready. But he couldn't, without telling him about the pictures, and the looking and choosing, and he'd never told anyone about that. And perhaps it was just as well, because the scaffold was in the pictures.

He'd looked at so many pictures it had given him a headache, and in all of them there was the scaffold, and the people crowding around it, and Lem Dyer dangling by his neck. And there was the deputy running out of the jail and shouting, stop, the governor just telephoned, and Lem Dyer is granted a reprieve, and the people laughing at Lem hanging there, and shouting, cut him down, and reprieve him.

It was nice of the governor, Lem thought, to take such an interest in him, and he'd gone on looking at pictures, trying to find one where the governor telephoned on time. There was one where Sheriff Darbson got sick, just as he was leading Lem up to the scaffold, and he lay there on the ground looking terrible, and Lem didn't like that even if it did hold things up until the governor telephoned. And there was a picture where the Glenn Hotel caught on fire, but some people got hurt, and Lem didn't want that. He'd gone on looking, and finally he found one where the rope broke, or came untied, and he fell right through the trap to the ground. It took some time to get things ready again, and the deputy came out shouting, stop, before they got Lem back up on the scaffold. Then the sheriff led him back towards the jail, with all the people following along behind. Lem liked that picture, and it was the one he chose.

He knew it wouldn't get him out of jail, and he'd have to look

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at pictures again. But he wasn't in any hurry. Looking at pictures made him terribly tired, especially now that he was getting old. He didn't like to do it unless he had to.

That was a mistake, Lem knew. If he'd looked at pictures he would not have jumped into the river to pull out the little Olmstead girl, and he wouldn't have carried her over to Doc Beasley's house, thinking the doctor might be able to help her. Or he would have made it come out some other way. But he hadn't looked at pictures, and people had started talking about how maybe it was Lem who killed the little girl, and finally they'd taken him to court, and had a trial.

Even then Lem hadn't looked at pictures, because he hadn't done anything, and he knew he didn't have anything to worry about. But the jury had said he was guilty, and Judge Wilson had said he was to hang by his neck until he was dead. Even Ted Emmons, who'd grown up to be a lawyer and was looking after things for Lem, started looking worried, and then Lem knew he'd better start looking at pictures again.

So he had, and now he'd made his choice, and everything would be all right.

He got up and fumbled in the dark for the can of tobacco, and suddenly the lights came on in the corridor, and footsteps shuffled in his direction.

"Visitors, Lem," the sheriff called. He stepped into sight, keys jangling, and unlocked the cell door.

The Reverend Meyers, of the Glenn Center First Baptist Church, gave Lem a deep-toned, "Good evening, Lem," gripped his hand, and then backed off into a corner and fussed with his hat. District Attorney Whaley nodded jerkily, and grinned. He was middle-aged, and getting a little fat and bald, but Lem remembered him as a tough kid stoning rats over at the town dump. Lem thought maybe he was feeling a little proud of the way he talked the jury into finding Lem guilty—but then, that was his job, and the people had elected him to do it.

Mr. Whaley's grin slipped away, leaving him tight-lipped. He cleared his throat noisily, and said, "Well, Lem, being as it's the last night, we were—that is, I was—wondering if maybe you had something to get off your chest."

Lem sat down, and tilted back in his chair. He puffed thoughtfully for a moment. "Why, no," he said slowly. "I don't reckon I've got anything on my chest that's botherin' me. I never went much to church, except on Christmas Eve, and that because I liked to watch the kids more than for the religion. The Revern here would say I wasn't a religious man, but I don't think he'd call me bad. I reckon maybe I've shot one or two deer and caught a few fish out of season, because I needed the meat, and I've bet some on the races at the county

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fair, but a lot of men do that. I don't think I ever broke any other laws, and I never hurt nobody, and I think maybe I did help a lot of people."

"Why, yes," Whaley said. "No one would ever call you a bad man, Lem. But even good men make mistakes, sometimes, and we'd all feel better, and so would you, if you told us about it."

"I told you all I know, Mr. Whalely," Lem said. "I saw the little girl floatin' in the river, and I thought she was drownin'. I did not know somebody'd choked her. I jumped in and pulled her out, and I remembered that sometimes drowned people could be brought to life, but I didn't know how, so I ran to Doc Beasley's with her. I can't tell more than that."

Whaley stopped his pacing to fumble for a cigarette. He didn't find one, and the sheriff gave him one, and held a match for him.

"It doesn't worry you, Lem?" Whaley asked. "You're going to hang in the morning. You wouldn't want to die with that on your conscience, would you?"

"It don't worry me none," Lem said evenly. "They don't hang innocent men, do they?"

"Why, no. . . ."

"Then I got nothin' to worry about. I won't hang." He nodded his gray head, and smiled peacefully.

Whaley turned abruptly. "Good luck, Lem," he said.

"Why, thank you, Mr. Whaley."

The sheriff followed Whaley out, and turned the key in the lock.

"Just holler when you're ready, Reverend," the sheriff said.

The footsteps faded away down the corridor.

A wistful grin touched Reverend Meyers' gaunt face. He lowered his long form awkwardly onto Lem's cot. "They're worried some, Lem," he said. "They'd feel a lot better if you up and told them you did it. They're beginning to think maybe they're hanging an innocent man tomorrow."

"I can't tell them I did it if I didn't, Revern."

"Of course not, Lem. *I* know you didn't do it. So do quite a few other people. We've been working on it, Lem—working hard. Ted Emmons, and I, and some others. We didn't want to say anything to you, because it might make you get to hoping, and we really didn't know if we could help you. But we've had some luck, now, and we think we know who killed the child. Ted Emmons is trying right now to get ahold of the governor, to get you a reprieve. All we need is a little more time."

Lem nodded. That explained the telephone call from the governor that would have come too late, if he hadn't looked at the pictures and made a choice. But it would be all right, now. He would get the reprieve, and then they would find the real murderer, and let Lem out of jail. And he wouldn't have to look at more pictures. He felt good

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about that, because looking at pictures tired him so.

"I'm glad to hear that," he said.

"Ted was having some trouble getting through to the governor, but he'll keep trying all night, if he has to. Just put your trust in God, Lem, and everything will be all right."

"I haven't been worryin', Revern."

"Keep faith with God, Lem. Do you mind if I pray for you?"

"You go right ahead, Revern."

Reverend Meyers bowed his head, and spoke softly. Lem watched, rather than listened, and felt almost alarmed. He hadn't put any faith at all in God. He'd put all his faith in his pictures, and the looking and choosing, and it disturbed him to think that maybe God was showing him the pictures, and letting him choose. He'd never thought of that before. The pictures were just something he'd always had, like ears to hear with, and a mouth to eat with, and eyes, and hands, and legs. But then—God gave out those things, or so he'd heard Reverend Meyers say, and maybe God had given him his pictures, too.

The Reverend Meyers intoned a soft, "Amen," and Lem said, "I'll have to do some thinkin', Revern."

"How's that, Lem?"

"What you said—faith in God, and that. I'll have to do some thinkin'."

"All right, Lem. I wish you would. And Lem—it might be that Ted won't reach the governor, or that the governor won't grant the reprieve. If that should happen, remember that the sheriff, and the district attorney, and the jury, have only done their duty. Have charity in your heart for all men. Remember what the Lord Jesus said on the cross. 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

"Sure, Revern. I'll remember."

"I'll be with you in the morning, Lem. And the sheriff will let you know right away if there's any good news."

The sheriff came for Reverend Meyers, and a moment later the lights were turned out, and Lem sat in the darkness, smoking his pipe and thinking.

He couldn't remember when he'd started seeing pictures, and making choices. He'd never done it very often, even when he was young, because it left him dizzy and kind of sick to his stomach, and sometimes he felt so bad afterwards that it scared him. But whenever he wanted something real bad he would sit down somewhere and close his eyes, and think about what it was he wanted. And the pictures would come, one after the other. It was like slowly flipping through a deck of cards and looking carefully at each one. And when he found the picture he wanted he would choose that one, and that's the way things would happen.

The other kids had envied him. They said Lem Dyer was the luckiest kid in three counties. He was always getting chances to run er-

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rands and do little things for people, and earn spending money. But all Lem would do, when he wanted a stick of candy badly enough, was to find a picture where some lady was leaving Crib's Store with an armful of groceries, and looking for someone to help her. And he would choose that one, and run down to Crib's Store, and whoever it was would come out and give him a penny to carry her groceries. He was always there when Mr. Jones wanted the sidewalk swept off in front of his barber shop, or when Banker Goldman wanted something run over to the post office in a hurry and everyone in the bank was busy. Lem didn't realize, then, that it was his choosing that made people want things done.

The other kids thought Lem was lucky, and Lem couldn't understand why they didn't look at pictures when they wanted things. He was maybe nine or ten when a bunch of them were stretched out down by the river talking, and Stubby Smith was saying how much he wanted a bicycle. And Lem said, "If you want one, why don't you get it?"

The kids hooted at him, and asked him why *he* didn't get one. Lem had never thought about getting something big, like a bicycle. He closed his eyes and looked at pictures, until he found one where little Lydia Morrow ran out into the street right in front of a runaway team, and Lem jumped after her and pulled her back, and Mr. Morrow took Lem right into his hardware store and gave him the bicycle he had in the window.

Lem chose that one, and he said, "Wait here, and I'll be back with a bicycle." He ran up town and got to Morrow's Hardware Store just as Lydia ran out into the street, and he was back at the river an hour later with his new bicycle.

For a long time Lem thought that the pictures he saw were just pictures of things that were going to happen. He'd been almost grown up before he understood that it was his choosing that made the thing happen. Before a horse race at the county fair, he could see pictures of every horse in the race winning. But if he made a choice, so he could bet on a horse, that horse would always win. He learned in a hurry that it wasn't smart to win all the time, so sometimes he would bet without even looking at pictures. But he always won enough money at the fair to last him through the winter.

Lem was twelve when his father fell off the barn, and got crippled, and Lem had to leave school and work the farm. After his mother and father died he'd rented out the farm, and built himself a shack back in the woods, near the river. He loved to hunt and fish, and he loved being outdoors. As he got older, people said it was a shame, a healthy man like him not working, and getting married, and raising a family. But he liked living by himself, and he had all the company he ever wanted because all the kids

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liked to play down by the river, near his shack. It never cost him much to live, and if he needed anything he could always look at pictures, and get what he wanted. If he wanted a job for a week or two, he could look at pictures, and then walk in to town, and find one waiting for him.

He'd had a happy life. He could choose a nice day, if he wanted to go fishing, or snow, if he wanted to do some tracking, or rain, if the farmers were having trouble about their crops. There was never much that he wanted, but he always got it. When hunting season opened, Lem Dyer always got the first buck, and the biggest one. He never went fishing without coming back with a nice string. And if a man needed help, chances were that Lem could help him.

He'd never told anyone about the pictures, and it disturbed him a little, now that he was sixty-one, to think that maybe it was God who was showing them to him. He wondered if maybe God had wanted him to do something important with them—something really big, like stopping wars, or getting the right man elected president, or catching criminals. He knew he could have done all those things, if he'd thought of it. There wasn't anything he couldn't do, just as long as he saw it in a picture, and chose it. He knew whenever he made a choice that that was the way things would happen.

But he never read the papers, and he'd never thought much about the world beyond Glenn Center. He was almost too old to start, now, but he decided he'd think some more about it, after he got out of jail. Maybe he should do something about those Russians so many people were worried about.

The clock on the Methodist Church was striking two when Lem finally went to bed.

The sheriff brought him his breakfast at four o'clock, a big plate of ham and eggs, and toast, and lots of steaming coffee. Lem could already hear the men gathering out in the field behind the jail, where the scaffold was. The Reverend Meyers came in before Lem finished eating, and his thin face was pale and grim.

"Ted is still trying," he said. Lem nodded. He wanted to tell the Reverend that everything would be all right, so he wouldn't worry. But if he did that he might have to tell him about the pictures. The Reverend was a good man, and Lem was sure he could trust him if he could trust anybody. But he wanted to think about it.

Lem finished his breakfast, and got down on his knees to pray when the Reverend asked him to. Then the sheriff came in, with two of his deputies, and they took Lem out to the scaffold, with the Reverend following along behind them.

The crowd filled the field and overflowed out onto First Avenue. Most every man from Glenn Center

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and for miles around was there, Lem decided. He didn't see any women or children, and later, when he got up on the scaffold, he saw that there weren't any. He stood looking around at the men, and he knew them all, every one of them, and he thought it was nice of them to get up so early in the morning just for him. They stood waiting quietly, not talking much, and looking the other way and not meeting Lem's eyes when he looked at them.

The Reverend was talking with the sheriff off at the edge of the scaffold, talking fast, with his hands gesturing urgently. And the sheriff kept shrugging and turning his hands palms up, and glancing at his watch. A deputy moved Lem over the trap and put the rope around his neck, and Lem looked up and smiled a little when he saw it was an old rope.

The sheriff's hands were trembling as he stepped forward. He patted Lem on the back, and the Reverend said a little prayer, and said, "God bless you, Lem," and out in the crowd Lem saw District Attorney Whaley turn slowly and stand with his eyes on the steeple of the Methodist Church. Then there was nothing under Lem's feet, and he was falling.

The savage jerk blurred his eyes with pain, but he kept falling, and sank to his knees on the ground under the scaffold. The air rocked with noise as everyone started talking and shouting. The sheriff came down and helped Lem out, and stood white-faced, staring at him.

"Get a new rope," someone shouted, and the crowd began to chant, "New rope! New rope!"

"You can't hang a man twice in one day," the Reverend was shouting, and the sheriff shouted back, above the roar of the crowd, "He has to hang by his neck until dead. That's the law."

Then everyone turned towards the jail, and a deputy was screaming and fighting his way through the crowd.

The sheriff, and the deputies, and the Reverend took Lem and started to push through the crowd back towards the jail. Lem's neck pained him, and his ankle hurt from the fall, and he was glad it was over with. They'd rounded the corner of the jail and started for the entrance, on Main Street, when the roaring fury of the crowd caught up with them and overwhelmed them. The sheriff went down trying to draw his revolver, and was trampled. A deputy rushed into the jail and barred the door, and he could be seen through the window excitedly bending over the telephone. The crowd boosted a man up the side of the building, to jerk the wires loose. Stones shattered the window, and rained into the jail.

Lem was dragged back towards the scaffold, and when a deputy ducked behind it and fired into the air, the crowd dragged him the other way, towards Main Street.

Jubilant shouts cut the air around

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him. "Get a rope!" "Anyone got a horse? They used to use horses!" "Don't need no horse. We can use Jake Arnson's truck. Jake, back your truck under that elm tree!"

Jake Arnson dashed down the street towards his truck. The motor coughed and sputtered, and finally caught with a roar, and the truck lurched backwards. Jake parked under the elm, cut the motor, and jumped out. Too horrified to feel the kicks and blows that rained upon him, Lem was hoisted onto the truck. A rope snaked up over a tree limb, and Lem stood, hands and feet bound, trembling with frustration, as it was knotted about his neck.

He told himself he should have waited to see all of the picture. He should have looked at more pictures —but how could he have known these men he knew so well would use him like this? And now he'd have to look at pictures again. He closed his eyes, and forced himself to concentrate.

The pictures flashed in front of him, one after the other, and in each picture the truck rocked forward and left Lem Dyer dangling by his neck.

Jake was back in his truck, trying to start the motor. The starter whined fretfully, and someone yelled, "Need a push, Jake?"

Lem kept watching the pictures until he felt the sickening certainty that pictures couldn't help him. In every picture the truck moved forward and left him hanging. There wasn't any other way. He shook the perspiration from his eyes, and looked out over the crowd. The sheriff lay in front of the jail, in a pool of blood. The Reverend lay in the middle of Main Street, moving his arms feebly, one leg twisted off at an ugly angle. Men were hurling stones at the scaffold, where a deputy had taken refuge.

Lem looked sadly at the hate-twisted faces of men he'd thought were his friends. He thought about what the Reverend had told him. Jesus had seen hate like that when they'd nailed him to the cross, and he'd said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Lem said the words to himself, softly. Maybe his old life wasn't worth much to anyone but himself, but it was sad.

The starter whined again, and someone called, "Speech! Can the murderer talk? Let's have a confession!"

"Confession!" the crowd echoed.

Lem threw his cracked voice out over the crowd. "You're evil men—evil! Get down on your knees, and pray that God won't punish you!"

He winced at the hoots and laughter that were flung back at him. "You dirty murderer! God won't punish *us*!"

The Reverend had slumped forward, and lay motionless. Doc Beasley had finally pushed his way through the crowd, and was bending over the sheriff. The faces below Lem blurred and twisted, and mortal anger overwhelmed him. "If

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God won't punish you," he screamed, "I will!"

And the pictures moved slowly before him.

A tornado, dragging its swirling funnel relentlessly along Main Street, flattening the buildings, crushing people and toppling the Methodist Church steeple onto the jail . . .

"Not enough!" Lem gasped.

A prairie fire, tossed high on gale winds, roaring hungrily down on Glenn Center, driving people before it . . .

"Not enough!"

Fleets of enemy planes darkening the sky, pouring searing death down even on such an insignificant dot on the map as Glenn Center . . .

"Not enough!"

The summer sun, high and bright at noon day, suddenly bulging crazily, tearing the sky asunder, drenching the countryside in blinding incandescence, turning the people into charred corpses, steaming away the rivers, crumbling buildings, boiling the very dust underfoot . . .

Lem chose that one, just as Jake Arnson got his motor started.

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CIVILIAN SAUCER INTELLIGENCE again report on

SHAPES IN THE SKY

and

LEE CHAYTOR returns with an exciting new novel—

BAIT FOR THE TIGER

—in *FANTASTIC UNIVERSE*

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a spudget for thwilbert

by . . . Theodore Cogswell

What problems will the men face, who have to, Tomorrow, market another generation's incredible breakfast foods?

THERE was gloom in the small and dingy office of the Intergalactic Breakfast Food Corporation. Herman Panzel, the president, sat glumly at his desk, staring at the sales chart on the farther wall and the thick red line that had started at zero six months ago and rested there securely ever since. His partner, Reuban Arnot, stood by the dirty window, gazing blankly out over the busy spaceport that linked the third planet of Sol with the rest of the galaxy.

"Well?" said Panzel at last.

Arnot turned and gave an expressive shrug. "We might as well face it," he said. "SNERPSIES has scooped the market with their Bild-a-Bomb kit."

"But look at the customers they are losing," growled Panzel. "A splattered child doesn't send in box tops."

"Maybe so, but SNERPSIES are selling and SQUIGGLES aren't." Arnot gestured sadly toward the sales chart. "The distributors won't touch our stuff until we come up with something special in the way of a premium, and that takes cash we haven't got." He leveled an accusing glance at his partner. "You

We have all met the idiot hero in mystery fiction. And we have all met the involuntary hero in all sorts of fiction. But we doubt that any of you have ever met, before this, as unusual a "character" as Count Thwilbert Whutzle, Hereditary War Lord of Hun and Licensed Galactic Trader.

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and your big ideas of going legit! If we'd hung on to our take from that last sucker we could be out on one of the pleasure satellites right now really living it up."

"All right, so I was wrong," said Panzel defensively. "But you'll have to admit that a completely automatic breakfast food factory for only 25,000 U's looked like a real deal."

Arnot sneered. "It was a real deal all right. Especially when it turned out that every box we produce has to be stamped UNFIT FOR HUMANOID CONSUMPTION."

"So what? Nobody ever eats the stuff anyway. And speaking of eating, don't forget that if I wasn't roping in a patsy on that phony off-planet franchise deal once in a while, you wouldn't be!"

Further discussion was interrupted by a timid knock at the door.

"More trouble," said Panzel.

"Maybe not," said Arnot and yelled, "Come in."

There was a scrabbling noise at the knob and then the door swung open slowly and a sad-faced, lizard-like creature came waddling in. Rearing himself up on his hind legs until he stood his full three foot four, he blinked nearsightedly at the two through mild protruding eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said in a meek voice that had strange whistling overtones to it, "but is this the office of the Intergalactic Breakfast Food Corporation?"

"Yeah," growled Panzel, obviously not impressed by the shabby appearance of the little reptile. "So what?"

"I am Count Whutzle, Count Thwilbert Whutzle, Hereditary War Lord of Hun." He paused for effect and then said proudly, "Licensed Galactic Trader. But I haven't got a family. Does that disqualify me?"

"From what?"

"From a BIG INCOME and a PERMANENT POSITION?" The little creature fished a crumpled news-facsimile sheet out of the worn pouch that hung at his side, smoothed it out, and began to read.

"*'You owe it to yourself and your family to give us the opportunity to talk to you and let us prove that we can put you in the 6,000-15,000 a year bracket. Valuable distributorships now available. Spaceship required.'*"

"You can say that again," said Arnot.

Thwilbert's protruding, lackluster eyes blinked in bewilderment. "Pardon, but what?"

"Spaceship required."

The little reptile let out a burbling hiss of relief. "This I have. It isn't of the latest production but it does have many holds."

Arnot started to let out a snort of disbelief and then caught himself.

"Let's see your papers."

Obediently Thwilbert fished a green card out of his pouch and held it out. Panzel took it, examined it, and then let out a surprised whistle.

"He's got a Mark-61!"

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"Clear title?"

"Yeah. What's more, he paid cash!"

With no transition, winter turned to spring. Thwilbert suddenly found himself hoisted in the air and tenderly deposited in the softest chair in the office.

"I hope you'll excuse the seeming lack of warmth in your reception," cooed Panzel. "We're just not used to being visited by celebrities . . . especially Hereditary War Lords."

Thwilbert's stubby tail gave an embarrassed twitch. "It isn't very much to be War Lord on Hun. I was third hatched, that's all. In fact, it's less than very much to be War Lord because on Hun we never have any wars. Everybody's too run-down to do any fighting. And anyway, there's nothing worth fighting over. On Hun there's just the sand and the spudgets and the whortle trees and us. There's enough whortle so that everybody can have all they want to eat and enough sand so that anybody who wanted any could have miles and miles all for himself." He sighed like a leaky teakettle. "There just wasn't much future to being Hereditary War Lord. That's why I volunteered."

Both Panzel and Arnot were somewhat confused at this point but they didn't let it show. The provocative scent of a liquefiable asset was titilating their nostrils.

"Volunteered?" said Panzel brightly.

"To be a galactic trader. All the other planets import and export so the Egg Father figured we'd better too. So he took part of the planetary treasury to buy a ship and gave the rest to me to buy additional trade goods."

"*Additional* trade goods?" said Arnot hungrily. "What did you start with?"

"Spudget eggs," said Thwilbert. "Spudgets are all we've got on Hun besides us. We sort of hoped that maybe someplace, somebody somehow would be able to find a use for them. We've never been able to."

He reached into the pouch that hung at his side and took out a glittering jewel-like object.

"Here's one. Hold it up to the light and look through it. Spudgets are kind of pretty."

Panzel did. Within the transparent sphere was suspended a tiny green dragon with gauzey golden wings.

"It's beautiful," he said in an awed voice. He turned the egg slowly between his fingers. "It looks almost alive."

"It is," said Thwilbert. "Carry it around in your pocket for a couple of weeks so it gets a little of your body heat and one morning you'll wake up to find a beautiful little spudget flying around the room. They make wonderful pets. Especially for children. They love each other on first sight."

Arnot grabbed the egg from his partner and examined it feverishly. "How many of these you got?" he

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demanded, unable to keep the excitement out of his voice.

"A couple of million," said Thwilbert. "They don't take up much space."

"And they eat . . . ?"

"Whortle leaves. I got my aft hold full of it."

Arnot grabbed his partner and hustled him off to the far corner of the office. There was a moment of whispered consultation and then Panzel rushed over to his desk, picked up his com set, and dialed.

"Central Information," said a tiny voice.

"I want to find out something about a small reptile called the spudget."

"Planet of origin?"

"Hun."

"One moment, please," said the voice, and then a second, obviously recorded, voice came on.

"The spudget, sometimes known as the dwarf huxle, is a small herbivorous reptile found only on the planet Hun. Its eggs, prized throughout the planet for their beauty, remain dormant until exposed to a heat of eighty degrees for about two weeks.

"The spudget is an extremely affectionate creature that is constitutionally incapable of violence. Of special interest is its beautiful song. The spudget subsists on a variety of *cannibus sativa* known as whortle. Its dwarfed size is believed to be due to the absence of an essential—"

There was a sudden click as Panzel reached forward and turned the speaker off. He turned to Thwilbert. "Mr. Thwutzle," he said and then hesitated. "What do they usually call you at home?"

"Well," said Thwilbert thoughtfully, "sometimes they say 'hey you' and sometimes they say 'hey you over there' but mostly they don't bother saying anything."

Panzel's genial smile stiffened.

"As Hereditary War Lord you must have a title."

Thwilbert thought for a moment. "Well, if somebody was to write me a really official letter I suppose they'd start out with Your Malignancy. Only nobody writes really official letters on Hun, and even if they did, knowing me, they'd probably begin with Hey You."

"Your Malignancy . . ." Panzel had trouble getting the title out but somehow he managed to keep a straight face while he was doing it. "Your Malignancy made a casual reference to *part* of the planetary treasury being left over after your ship was bought?"

"It wasn't much of a treasury," said Thwilbert. "There was only about five thousand left. When I saw your advertisement about how H.P. of Arcturus made four hundred univs his first day out without any previous experience, I thought I might invest part of it in your product."

"*Part* of it?" Panzel frowned and then said severely, "Really, Your Malignancy, I don't think you realize the scope of our operations."

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Thwilbert quailed at the stern tone and let out a squeaky little sigh as he hopped down and started for the door on all fours.

"I was afraid big executives like you wouldn't be interested in a little operation like mine." He reached up for the doorknob but he didn't quite make it. Somehow he was back in the soft seat again. Panzel bent over him, stabbed an index finger into the dusty scales of his hollow chest, and roared:

"ARE YOU A QUITTER?"

Thwilbert found himself involuntarily shaking his head in denial.

"Of course not! There is power within you, Whutzle—tremendous power just waiting to be released. You know it and I know it. Your chance is here! The time is now!"

The office seemed to ring with a flourish of invisible trumpets.

"Let me be the first to shake hands with our newest franchised dealer."

The little lizard looked slightly dazed as first Mr. Panzel and then Mr. Arnot pumped his right paw vigorously.

"And now," said the president smoothly, "to the matter of the necessary capital investment."

Thwilbert's throat pouch began to twitch nervously. "But that five thousand is all I've got and . . ."

"That's all right," interrupted Arnot. "I realize that you realize that it isn't enough but I'm sure that we can talk Mr. Panzel into accepting a first mortgage on your ship for the balance." With a swift gesture he whisked several complicated looking forms out. . . .

"Now if you'll just sign here . . . and here . . . and here . . ."

Thwilbert began to wiggle unhappily. "Maybe I'd better take a little time to think it over," he said hesitantly. "I'm pleased and grateful that you gentlemen should have so much faith in me, but five thousand is an awful lot of money. And if I mortgage my ship . . . well . . . I mean, it just isn't me. Hun is depending on me."

"Ah," said Panzel. "Mr. Arnot, it occurs to me that in our excitement we have neglected to show His Malignancy the proven item with which R.A. of Sirius made 3429 univs his first week."

"Thirty-four hundred in a single week!"

"Average, just average," said Panzel airily. He pulled open his desk drawer, reached in, and pulled out a gaudily colored carton. His voice lowered reverently. "SQUIGGLES, The Breakfast Food of Supermen, a wonderful body building product containing that rare vitamin complex, K-9."

"And that isn't all," chimed in Arnot. "They not only snap, crackle, and pop—they wiggle while you eat."

Thwilbert was properly impressed. Before he had a chance to realize just what was happening, he had affixed his name to several papers, signed a check for five thousand univs, given Panzel a mortgage on his Mark-61, and was being

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ushered smoothly out of the office.

"We'll be down to see you off in the morning," said Panzel. "Give us your berth number and we'll have that junk you're carrying dumped out so you'll be able to carry a maximum load of SQUIGGLES."

"I'm in slot thirty-seven," said Thwilbert, "but isn't tomorrow awfully early? I mean, shouldn't I spend some time here in the home office getting a little training?"

"Be a waste of time," said Arnot. "You're a natural, Your Malignancy, a natural!"

The next morning the early bird set out for Canopus 4 looking for the worm. In his heart was high resolve, in his pouch a spudget egg almost ready to hatch, and in his holds an incredible number of cartons of SQUIGGLES—each carefully stamped UNFIT FOR HUMANOID CONSUMPTION.

Once the distributors got a good look at the premium, SQUIGGLE sales soared to fantastic heights. The Intergalactic Breakfast Food Corporation asked, and received, a hundred box tops and five univs for each spudget egg, and it wasn't long before several thousands of them were transferred to the pants pockets of a like number of small boys.

Business boomed even more as tiny spudgets began to come to life and break out of their shells. They were affectionate little beasts, loving everybody and being loved in return—but never more loved than when they began to sing. Their song was more golden than their wings, a liquid trilling that pulsed out in rich impossible arpeggios. At sunset they sang, swinging the air in flashing spirals, but always when their song was done they came winging back to perch contentedly on the shoulders of their small masters and chirp sleepy little night tunes in their ears.

Delight rode the land—until the first spudgets hatched began to exhibit signs of hunger. Days passed, and as their little ribs began to project through their iridescent skins, their happy songs changed to mournful laments.

Small boys went sobbing to their fathers, and their fathers wrote long and angry letters to the Intergalactic Breakfast Food Corporation—only to receive soothing replies informing them that an adequate supply of whortle, the spudgets' favorite food, would shortly be made available at only five box tops and one univ per feeding.

"Flowers!" said Panzel suddenly as he poured himself another drink of Aldebaranian *stenga*. "I think we should send some flowers."

"Where and who for?" asked Arnot as he reached over and took possession of the bottle.

"To Canopus 4. What was that lizard's name anyway, Worsel?"

Arnot thought for a moment. "No, Worsel was that flying croc from out Valentia way who we conned out of his lens. Whutzle was our boy's name, Thwilbert

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Whutzle. But why send flowers?"

Panzel gave a nasty chuckle. "When I unloaded the whortle, I cleaned out the private stock he had tucked away in the ship's larder."

"So?"

Panzel snickered again. "You know what he's been eating for the last six weeks?"

The other shook his head.

"Squiggles!"

Just then there was an imperious knock at the door and before they could answer it, it swung open and an imposing figure in the uniform of the Galactic Guard stalked in. He spoke briefly and then left, leaving behind him two broken promoters.

"How was I to know that whortle was a dangerous narcotic?"

"Save your breath," growled Arnot. "We've got to move fast if we're going to salvage anything out of this mess."

"But they're going to burn our whortle. What'll we do about all those hungry spudgets?"

"Find something else they'll eat, stupid. Now let's get to work!"

They obtained one of the first spudgets to be hatched and anxiously tried every type of food they could think of. The little dragon would nibble lackadaisically at what was put before it, sob softly, and then promptly throw up. In the meantime sales of their main competitor, SNERPSIES, spurted ahead as grim faced small boys labored over Bild-a-Bomb kits in attics and basements. Things were at their worst when they got a sudden emergency call from outer space.

"It isn't for myself," said Thwilbert apologetically, his voice almost inaudible because of the distance the beam had to cover, "but my spudget. He hatched a week ago and he's hungry. In fact we're both hungry. You didn't leave us any whortle."

"Cut him off," growled Arnot to his partner. "We got enough troubles without spending the day yaking with an undersized lizard at five univs a minute. Tell him to break out the SQUIGGLES. That'll put them both out of their misery."

"We did," wailed the distant voice, "but my spudget . . ."

Arnot jumped up and shoved his partner away from the com set. "Hold it," he shouted. "Did you say you were feeding your spudget SQUIGGLES?"

"Yes, but he doesn't like them very well, and for the last couple of days . . ."

"He will eat them, though?"

"Yes, but . . ."

With a howl of glee Arnot broke the connection. "Let's get going, pal," he shouted to his partner. "This time we'll really clean up."

This time they really did. The automatic factory worked round the clock due to the unexpectedly hearty appetites displayed by the spudgets who, in spite of a certain amount of initial gagging, once the word was passed soon regained their normal tunefulness and plumpness on a steady diet of SQUIGGLES. Arnot

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and Panzel took one good look at their rapidly expanding bank account and promptly took off for a two-week swing around the plushier of the pleasure satellites. They returned just in time to find their newly acquired secretary emptying her desk with a determined expression on her face.

"I quit!" she said angrily. "I ain't going to work in no zoo. That pet of yours has gone through fifty boxes of SQUIGGLES in the last twenty-four hours."

"What's the matter?" asked Panzel anxiously.

Without a word she went over to the closet where the corporation's demonstration spudget was kept, and dramatically threw open the door. Instead of a twitter of welcome from a tiny glittering dragon, a five hundred pound lizard came wandering into the room, croaked affectionately, and tried to climb into Panzel's lap.

"And that ain't all," said the secretary as she started toward the door. "Its voice is changing. All morning it's been trying to sing bass." She shuddered. "Me, I don't want to be around when it finally gets its full growth."

After the door slammed there was a long moment of silence and Panzel slowly reached for his desk com.

"The spudget," said the tinny voice from Central Information, "sometimes known as the dwarf huxle, is a small herbivorous reptile . . ."

"I know all that," interrupted Panzel in a shaking voice. "What I want to know is why it's called the *dwarf* huxle. The one I've got is up to five hundred pounds and it's still growing."

"Its dwarfed size is believed to be due to the absence of an important vitamin complex in its only food, the whortle leaf. This complex has been tentatively identified as K-9, a growth complex essential to reptiles."

Panzel looked at Arnot and Arnot looked at Panzel and then they both looked at the box of SQUIGGLES. The large K-9 printed in red on its front seemed to wink at them.

Herman Panzel, former president of the Intergalactic Breakfast Food Corporation, and Reuban Arnot, former executive vice-president and treasurer of the same organization, having just squandered their last deciuniv on a cup of coffee substitute, sat disconsolately in a small dingy cafeteria down by the spaceport of a small dingy planet, half way across the galaxy, waiting for something to happen. Nothing was.

"At least we're alive," said Arnot. "They wanted to lynch us."

"We won't be for long unless we make some arrangement that involves a meal once in a while," said Panzel. "Let's face it, we're either going to have to go to work or starve, and much as I dislike the former . . ." His voice trailed off as he spotted a morning newsfacsimile abandoned on an adjoin-

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ing table. He went over and got it. Bringing it back, he spread it open to the Help Wanted section and began to pour through the ads.

"Find something light," suggested Arnot. "I've got a weak back."

"That isn't all that's weak," snorted the other. "It was your bright idea about those spudget eggs that got us into all this. Now let's see you get us out."

"Give me the paper then," said Arnot and pulled it over to him. There was a moment of silence as he considered and then rejected offer after offer. Suddenly his eyes lit up.

"This is for us!"

"*'Would you like to make 150 univs in just half an hour? T.W. did.'*"

"Go ahead," said Panzel eagerly. "This sounds like what we've been looking for."

Arnot let out a sudden whistle of amazement and then said in a strangled voice, "Thwilbert!"

"What?"

"Look!"

Sure enough, it was Thwilbert, in fact a pair of Thwilberts. Two pictures stood at the head of a quarter page advertisement. One was of a weak emaciated lizard who looked just like the one who had shambled into their office so many months before. It was captioned BEFORE. The other was of a sleek and handsome saurian, scales iridescent instead of a dirty gray, sunken chest now filled out with bulging muscles, and an alert air of vigorous self-confidence instead of the old diffidence. It was captioned AFTER. Above the pictures stretched a banner caption which proclaimed, FROM A 36 POUND WEAKLING TO THE GALAXY'S MOST PERFECTLY DEVELOPED REPTILE. Underneath it continued, *"Rejecting old inefficient substitutes, millions of sentient saurians are now demanding . . ."* Arnot's voice choked off. "Read me the rest," he said. "All of a sudden I can't see so good."

Panzel took the paper and continued.

" . . . millions of sentient saurians are now demanding SQUIGGLES, the wonder food that contains the magic reptilian growth element, K-9. Valuable franchises now open. Send 10 univs to Thwilbert Whutzle, President, Intergalactic Breakfast Food Company, Hun, for complete information."

There was a long silence and then with a note of almost paternal pride, Herman Panzel said softly, "And he's making them pay for the privilege of being taken! Arnot, we're getting old."

"But he's not taking them," said Arnot. "The stuff works." He hesitated for a moment and then looked back at the advertisement. "Do you think he'd let us in for nothing? One fifty in half an hour sounds mighty good to me."

"Could be," said Herman Panzel rising decisively to his feet. "After all, we're the ones who gave him his start."

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grand prize

by . . . Richard Wilson

There are a few of us left. Only a relative handful of us on Earth have escaped the infestation which spread that Sunday night from the television studio on West 67th Street in Manhattan.

There are several ways in which They can invade the Earth. There are the usual methods — and then this!

THE master of ceremonies was, as usual, genial, polysyllabic Ted Massey.

"Masks all in place, panel?" he asked the four expert, permanent guessers on *Who Am I?*, telecast coast-to-coast. Also, by perverse fate, for the first time that night the show crossed under the Atlantic in the new cable to the BBC in London.

The panel nodded, fingering their masks.

"Then will our special guest come in, please!"

There was a murmur from the studio audience, then applause punctuated by wolf whistles.

"Am I correct in assuming that our guest is a beautiful young lady?" asked Specs Sullivan, mock-adjusting the eyeglasses painted on the front of his mask.

"Not so fast, please, Specs," Ted Massey said. "First let me ask if

Richard Wilson, while perhaps better known as the author of THE GIRLS FROM PLANET 5 *(Ballantine, 35 cents), that highly enjoyable report on a most unusual alien invasion, is also the author of the recent* THOSE IDIOTS FROM EARTH *(Ballantine, 35 cents), a group of his extremely effective short stories.*

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our guest is familiar with the way we play the game."

The guest, who was indeed a ravishing embodiment of femininity, nodded shortly and seated herself next to Massey under the giant banner advertising *DRI*, the waterless soap.

"Our guest knows the rules," Massey said. "And so let us commence, though we shouldn't, with Specs Sullivan, who broke the rules by speaking out of turn."

"I stand humbly rebuked, Ted," Specs remarked amiably. "All right, guest, *are* you a beautiful young lady?"

The gorgeous creature at Massey's side turned to him with a shrug.

"I'll answer for our guest, who is obviously embarrassed. If you could see her, Specs, it would be apparent to you that your question falls some considerable distance short of the facts."

"You could say 'Yes,' Ted, even if it's not the longest word in the language. All right. Now, miss, judging by the applause, you're someone I'd recognize if I weren't so unfortunately masked. Is that right?"

"No," she replied.

"One down!" Ted crowed. "Now, Lucy Drew, our charming and talented and highly perspicacious representative of the fourth estate, Lucy?"

Pert, bright Lucy Drew frowned and said, "Something's peculiar here, Ted. First, if our guest is not someone we'd recognize—that is, a celebrity—why are we masked? And if she isn't a celebrity, you've neglected to give us the usual pittance of information about whether she's salaried or self-employed."

Ted Massey laughed with false heartiness. "Forgive me, Lucy and panel. While you would not recognize our guest by her appearance, there is about her a certain *je ne sais quoi* which requires that you wear masks. That will be clear later in the game. As for her occupation, Lucy, I should have given you that clue. I don't seem to be entirely myself tonight. She is salaried."

Lucy played blindly with a pencil. "I can't put my finger on it, but you do sound a bit odd tonight, Ted. I'll go on. Mystery Guest, do you work for a profit-making organization?"

"No," the young woman answered promptly.

"Two down!" Ted Massey cried. "Now our distinguished novelist and man-about-town, Mr. Arthur Bennett. Arthur?"

"I'll have to admit, Ted, that I'm as puzzled as Lucy by this change in our routine, but I'll try. You used the phrase *je ne sais quoi*. Knowing you, Ted, I'm sure you wouldn't have given us that hint if our guest was actually French. But I'll ask this: Miss X, may I assume that you are not an American?"

"No."

"Yes," said Massey. "Our guest means yes, she is not an American. Go on, Arthur."

"Very good. Now, we've estab-

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lished that you are a salaried employee of a non-profit-making organization. Do you by any chance work for a government?"

The young woman stared at Arthur Bennett as if she were trying to bore through his mask. So far she had not looked directly at the studio audience or into the television cameras.

"Yes," she said.

"Excellent, Arthur," Massey said. "Now all you have to do is establish which government." The master of ceremonies smiled tentatively at their guest. She didn't smile back. She looked cold and businesslike.

"Well," Arthur Bennett said, "it would be fitting, in view of the inauguration of Transatlantic television and the fact that our show is being seen right now in England on the BBC, if our guest were employed by the British government."

"No," the guest said decisively.

"Three down!" Massey said. "But you're not doing badly, panel. Not at all. Now we come to our fourth questioner, the vivacious star of stage, screen, television *and* et cetera, Millie Pennington. Millie?"

"I won't try to guess what government it is our guest represents, Ted," Millie Pennington said. "I'll leave that to some of our world travelers. But let me ask this, Miss—Miss X: Are you in this country on a good will mission?"

"No!" The answer exploded out of the beautiful young woman.

"Well!" Millie said. "That's emphatic enough." She giggled nervously. "Do you mean you're here on a *bad* will mission?"

"Yes," the guest replied before Ted Massey could intervene. She smiled for the first time. It wasn't a friendly smile.

There was a stir in the studio audience and the panelists moved their masked heads in confusion, whispering to each other.

"Really, Ted," Millie said. "I don't know what she means by that. I—I pass."

"I think the meaning will be clear in time," Massey said with professional smoothness. "I can only say now, panel, that our guest is not misleading you, though perhaps she could have phrased the answer to that last question more tactfully." He turned to the young woman at his side and shook his head, frowning. She grinned at him and hissed something.

"Well," Massey said, "we're back to Specs Sullivan. Any ideas, Specs?"

"Maybe our guest is the wife of the Good Humor man," Specs ventured. "The Bad Humor woman. No, but seriously—"

"I don't like that man," the mystery guest said quite audibly. "Let me—"

"Not yet," Massey interrupted hastily. "Ha-ha. Let's all play the game now. I'll admit this is a tough one, panel—"

"I'll say she's tough," Specs muttered.

"—and if Mr. Sullivan is

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through, we'll go on to Lucy Drew again. Four down, and time is racing along."

"Hey!" Specs said. "I didn't give up. That bad humor crack was just a gag."

"Four down," Massey repeated firmly. "Lucy?"

"You *are* being an old meany tonight, Ted," Lucy said. "I think it's still Specs' turn. What happened to the rules?"

"Five down!" Massey said, his voice rising. "Arthur?"

"Really, Ted," Arthur Bennett said. "What's got into you. We're perfectly willing to play the game, but this is getting ridiculous. You can't—"

"Six down!" A desperate edge had crept into Ted Massey's voice. "Millie? Do you give up, too?"

"Why, no, of course not. I—"

"Yes, you do, you brainless clothes-horse. Seven down! Who's next? Specs? You've disqualified yourself, you four-eyed idiot. Eight down!"

"Now just a minute!" Specs Sullivan stood up, quivering, and ripped off his mask. "This has gone far enough! You've insulted Miss Pennington, not to mention me, and I demand that you apologize at least to her."

He picked up his glasses and put them on.

"You're on camera, ladies and gentlemen!" somebody whispered loudly from among the technicians. "Please!"

"On camera or off," Specs said, "this is a disgraceful performance—"

"Nine down!" Ted Massey cried. "Ten and out! You all lose! Everybody loses! Take off your masks, the rest of you. Go on, take them off and look at the mystery guest. Look!"

The others unmasked. They looked.

"I don't know her," Lucy Drew said. "And I must say I don't know you, either, Ted. What is it? Are you ill?"

"He must be drunk," Arthur Bennett said.

"Not drunk," Ted Massey said. He began to sob. "Not ill. Lost. First me, now you, then all. We're all lost, and *she* wins the grand prize. She's won the Earth for her government. Look at her. Look!" He fell forward across his desk, crying "Lost, lost."

The beautiful young woman looked in turn into the eyes of each of the panelists. She then looked for the first time into the camera's lens.

Too late, someone rushed out and swung the camera away.

Before the program was cut off the air millions of people in the United States and Canada and hundreds of thousands more across the ocean in Britain had been fixed by her scornful, will-destroying gaze and watched in revulsion as she changed to her own alien shape.

It spread from there.

Every glance into another's eyes

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transmitted the cancer of alien possession.

Faster than the plague it traveled, north from the Canadian cities to the Arctic, south through Mexico to Central and South America, east from Britain to the Continent, north to Scandinavia, south through Italy and Spain and across the Mediterranean to Africa, east to Russia and Asia, along the island chain to Australia.

Lost.

The invasion is complete. Earth is conquered.

But not quite.

We, the few who escaped, are the hope.

We, the immune, who hid, listening, evading capture, then fled to this unnamed refuge.

We, the handful, who now plan in the darkness, as best we can, to repossess our conquered world.

We, the few, against the billions.

We, the blind.

ORIGIN OF THE DEROS?

Y. N. Ibn Aharon, in an article on "Extraterrestrialism as an Historical Doctrine" (*Saucer News*, Jan. 1958, P. O. Box 163, Fort Lee, N. J.) refers to a race described in Chaldaic literature as the Nakhash-na, or Serpent Men, who arrived on Earth "before the biotic development of the planet" and were eventually forced underground. Able but malevolent scientists, they played a negative role in history during the period between 3000 and 500 B. C., says the writer, interfering in "the government of pre-dynastic Egypt" (presumably prior to 3000 B. C. though) and in the "mountain states of Central Asia and China. There is some evidence that they are still around, and the subject bears further study."

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universe in books

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

A discussion of some new books, and an announcement of this fall's 16th World Science Fiction Convention.

THERE is a temptation, sometimes, to forget that Science Fiction means many things to many people.

It is a way of life, or close to that, to some.

It is a glittering, never-never land for still others.

It is a morbid, inbred excursion into abnormal psychology for still others.

It is a precise, humorless extrapolation upon a scientifically established fact for still others.

And it is also the ironically tinted window through which we may catch a glimpse of potential Tomorrows.

And it is Lester del Rey's portrait of that Tomorrow.

ROBOTS AND CHANGELINGS (Ballantine Books, 35 cents) illustrates this point. *The Pipes of Pan* is the ironic story of what happens to the God in an age where Gods are no longer in demand; *The Coppersmith* is the gentle story of Ellowan Coppersmith, and a story I would have been delighted to have published; while *The Monster* is characteristic of del Rey's ability to set himself into the minds of his characters, a considerably more unusual achievement than the reference to it may

A report on three anthologies of interest to SF and fantasy readers, each reflecting the many facets of this field we call Science Fiction. As previously announced, it is hoped that this column will now appear monthly, discussing books and matters which may interest SF and fantasy readers.

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suggest. . . . By all means buy ROBOTS AND CHANGELINGS tonight! This is literate, thoughtful Science Fiction at its best!

I wish I could say the same thing about THREE TIMES INFINITY (Gold Medal, 25 cents), three novelettes of Tomorrow which I suspect will confuse those readers who look to the Gold Medal imprint for a more rugged school of writing. Ray Bradbury and Leigh Brackett's LORELEI OF THE RED MIST, featuring "tall and sleek and insolently curved" Rann, very definitely represents the glittering never-never land school of science fiction, while Robert Heinlein's DESTINATION MOON is, with recent headlines in mind, topical if not particularly credible space-opera. Theodore Sturgeon's THE GOLDEN HELIX, very definitely a contrast to the other two, is an interesting excursion into genetic bypaths. These are good names and these are competently told stories, but there is a curious absence of that indefinable quality of agelessness often found in Sturgeon's work and in that of Heinlein.

The 16th WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION meets in Los Angeles from August 29th through September 1st, 1958. These annual meetings are of course a unique opportunity to meet fans and pros, active in fantasy and science fiction. Your membership fee of One Dollar will bring you all issues of the Convention Journal and the Program Booklet which will contain an up-to-the-minute list of "Solacon" Members Names and Addresses, a unique directory of SF fans and pros. For further information, I suggest you write (don't forget that Dollar!) to Rick Sneary, Treasurer, SOLACON, 2962 Santa Ana Street, South Gate, California.

Anthony Boucher, in his introduction to THE VARIABLE MAN AND OTHER STORIES, by Philip Dick (Ace Books, 35 cents) pays tribute to one of the writer's qualities—"the chilling symbolism of absolute nightmare."

I am not certain that this is a good quality.

There is a tendency to measure realism by its shock effect upon the reader, an admittedly literate elaboration upon the ages-old compulsion, which has attained maturity-of-sorts in rather sick novels of sick small towns.

We have no assurance that the world of Tomorrow will be a particularly pleasant place. After reading Philip Dick's *Second Variety* and, in a sense, *A World of Talent,* we may have added reason to doubt this possibility. Philip Dick's Tomorrow is a grim period in the pilgrimage of man towards the stars, a grim and curiously familiar period, whose vividness and whose aliveness is tribute to the writer's unquestioned ability. Recommended —but with some reservations.

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shapes in the sky

by . . . Civilian Saucer Intelligence

A report on what the authors identify as "the sky-ice age" —another aspect of this past UFO-aware decade since Arnold.

IN THE late 1940's there appeared in the skies of this planet a new phenomenon. As yet unrecognized by science, it is now attested to by a multitude of reliable witnesses. Conventional explanations are put forward to account for the observations; invariably, on closer investigation, it turns out that they do not fit the case. In 1950 the British Air Ministry called it "one of the biggest mysteries of the century."

Flying saucers? Not at all. The Air Ministry was referring to *the fall of masses of ice from a clear sky.*

So far as we can ascertain, this phenomenon *never occurred before the modern UFO age*—which is conventionally dated from Kenneth Arnold's observation of June 30, 1947. We may be wrong about this, of course. Those who have previously written on the subject of "ice-falls" have emphasized the fact that Charles Fort collected many 19th-century instances of the fall of extraordinarily large chunks of ice; indeed, this was a subject of particular interest to that great discoverer. (*Books of Charles Fort,* pp. 180-191.) But look up Fort's references, as we have done. You will find that in no case is it asserted that

The Research Section of Civilian Saucer Intelligence now turns to another subject of interest to students of Ufology, and briefly referred to in Ivan Sanderson's recent article in the February issue. CSI, a New York research group, publishes a newsletter and holds occasional open public meetings.

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these iceblocks fell from a clear sky. Wherever details are available, it is stated that they fell *in a violent hailstorm,* or *with a tornado.* If Fort in his heroic researches ever came upon a single record of the greater marvel—boulders of ice tumbling from a cloudless sky—he refrained from referring to it in any of his four books.

And yet, in the brief period 1949-1957, this has occurred at least fifty times.

There is no doubt that great masses of ice have always fallen in tempests, and are still doing so. Even this is so incredible and inexplicable that, in Fort's words, "against these data there is a silence on the part of scientific men that is unusual." According to the calculations, based on actual experiment, of Bilham and Relf (*Quart. J. Roy. Met. Soc. 63* [1937], 149), true hailstones more than a pound and a half in weight and five inches in diameter—about the size of a grapefruit—cannot conceivably be formed in nature. They found that to support a five-inch stone in mid-air while it is growing requires an upward air current moving at "only" 110 miles per hour, not much faster than the most violent hurricanes; but to support a *six*-inch one a 260-mph updraft would be called for. (The most powerful thunderstorm updraft yet measured is about 40 miles per hour: H. Weickmann in *Thunderstorm Electricity,* U. of Chicago, 1953, p. 109.) Grapefruit-sized hailstones are known: some fell at Potter, Nebraska, in July of 1928 (Weickmann, p. 116.) As a matter of fact, stones well above the Bilham-Relf "maximum" are known, too: see *Hailstorms of the U. S.,* by Snowden D. Flora, for a photograph of a four-pounder.

But above this, it seems fair to say, we enter the realm of the really phenomenal—ice lumps so huge that no one can think that they were formed and sustained in mid-air—the realm of the "damned." On April 2, 1957, in a hailstorm near Texarkana, Ark., fell an 8½" hailstone weighing six pounds (AP wire story, April 4.) Off Cette, France, October, 1844, ships were sunk by hailstones weighing up to 11 lbs. (Flammarion, *The Atmosphere,* p. 34.) As we write this article, it is reported that the town of Dubai, in the Trucial Oman on the Persian Gulf coast, has been devastated by a storm in which hailstones "described as a foot long" killed fifteen persons and wrecked hundreds of houses, in what British officials called "the worst disaster of this century in the area" (N. Y. *News* and London *Telegraph,* Nov. 25, 1957.) Near Seringapatam, in southern India, May 22, 1851, in a storm, fell many hailstones as large as pumpkins (*Repts. B. A. A. S.,* 1855, p. 33.) At Salina, Kansas, Aug., 1882, in a hailstorm, fell a flat slab of ice 29" x 16" x 2", weighing eighty pounds (*Scientific American, 47* [1882], p. 119.) In Lungsi, Kansu province, inner China, on May 18, 1936, in a terrific hail-

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storm, fell a slab of ice weighing more than 100 pounds; on May 22, 1937, *at the same place,* an even worse storm occurred, in which there fell several blocks of this size, and one angular slab some 6′ x 3′ x 10″, weighing more than 500 pounds. This ice was found to be permeated with dirt—a description that we shall encounter again. (Father Paul Müller, in *Natur und Kultur 33* (1936), 332; *34* (1937), 480: with photographs of both ice-blocks.) On August 6, 1849, at Muir of Ord near Inverness in the Scottish Highlands, after a tremendous peal of thunder, fell a mass of ice about seven feet in diameter. "It had a beautiful crystalline appearance, being nearly all quite transparent and composed of diamond-shaped squares from 1 to 3 inches in size, firmly congealed together—if we except a small portion of it, which consisted of hailstones of uncommon size, fixed together." (*Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal,* 47 (1849), 371.) In April, 1838, "a mass of hailstones cemented into one block" fell at Dharwar, near Goa, in India; "it was 19 ft. 10 inches in its largest diameter" (*Repts. B. A. A. S.,* 1851, p. 31). And about 1800, at Seringapatam, there fell a block of ice the size of an elephant. (Hyne, *Tracts on India* [1814,] p. 29.)

These giant ice-masses cannot be considered as hailstones. They do not even resemble hailstones. The really big ones are flat, angular slabs, looking as if broken from ice-floes; or else they are flattish masses of frozen-together hailstones; or both together, as at Muir of Ord. Fort drew attention to this flat, or flake-like formation of ice from the sky. (He gives many other references to the fall, in hailstorms, of flat, angular pieces of ice of less titanic dimensions than those cited here.) To account for it, he conceived of aerial ice-fields floating in a kind of gravitational "inversion layer" at stratospheric heights: "I shall have to accept that, floating in the sky of this earth, there are fields of ice as extensive as those on the Arctic Ocean." It was his idea that the upper-air disturbance created by a violent thunderstorm sometimes dislodged some of this aerial ice and brought it crashing down to earth.

Weird as this theory may appear, it has more in its favor than the alternative supposition that these immense masses of ice are *true meteorites* (originated by Schwedoff, *Repts. B. A. A. S.,* 1882, p. 453.) The ice-meteorite theory was an especially congenial one to the followers of Hans Hoerbiger's pseudo-scientific *Welteislehre* (Cosmic Ice Theory), popular in pre-war Germany: for example, the handsomely-printed *Mitteilung des Hoerbiger-Instituts* (Aug., 1939, pp. 104-131) reprinted the Kansu cases, arguing that they should be considered as meteorites. Ice meteorites are certainly possible (though it seems likely that they would be entirely volatalized in passage through the atmosphere); but the ice-meteorite theory as ap-

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plied to such ice-falls is absurd, because it totally fails to account for their very conspicuous association with violent storms—an association which persisted *until the UFO age.*

Actually, the first ice-fall of the "modern" type known to us occurred as recently as September 11, 1949. The place was the Tipton Ranch, northwest of Breckenridge in north central Texas, and the witness was a physician, Dr. Robert Botts, who was hunting doves. At 4:30 p.m. a hot sun was shining, "a few thunderheads were in the sky, but none overhead," when Dr. Botts heard a whistling sound, and looked up to see something white tumbling down toward him. It crashed to the ground only five yards away and smashed into fragments: a block of ice, its weight estimated at forty pounds. Dr. Botts's companions, Dr. Treadwell and Dr. Tipton, arrived soon afterwards and also saw the shattered ice on the ground. Dr. Tipton said that it "had somewhat the appearance of hail, except for the dimensions"; it was not clear ice, but *milky.* Someone had the idea of tasting it, and found that it had *a soapy flavor.* As we shall see, these curious properties are highly typical of "sky ice." For this well-reported case we are indebted to a letter from Lewis Matthews printed in FATE, Aug., 1950, p. 86.

More than a year after this, on the morning of Nov. 11, 1950, a sheep farmer of Popham, on Exmoor in southwestern England, found one of his ewes lying dead, a fifteen-pound ice-block half-buried nearby, and other masses of ice "as big as dinner plates" scattered over the ground for a distance of four miles. The weather had been unusually warm, but he had not been aware of any thunderstorm. It is said that in 1910, in almost precisely the same place, three sheep had similarly been killed by falling ice. (Harold T. Wilkins in FATE, May-June, 1951, pp. 22-27; this article is the source of all our information about English ice-falls, unless otherwise stated.)

This sheep-killing ice, thrown down in such quantity over a four-mile path, fell in much greater abundance than in any other modern case. Since it was not actually seen to fall, we suspect that both this and the 1910 Exmoor ice-fall may really have been ice-falls of the "old" or "Fortean" type, associated with intense local hailstorms. Like tornadoes, to which they are closely related, ice-spewing tempests concentrate their fury in a remarkably narrow path. In the *Trans. Roy. Soc. Edinburgh,* 1823, p. 187, is an account of a ferocious storm of ice that injured cattle and killed sixty geese on the Scottish island of Stronsay—yet went unsuspected by people no more than a mile away. There are many other examples of this localization. This may have happened on Exmoor.

Be that as it may, the epidemic of ice-falls that shortly thereafter broke out in the vicinity of London were definitely unconnected with hailstorms. On the evening of Nov.

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24th, a foot-square chunk of ice struck the roof of a garage in Wandsworth (in southwestern London) with such a crash that the watchman thought the boiler had blown up. The ice, which had punched a two-foot hole in the roof, was given to the British Air Ministry, which reported on the 30th that it was "cloudy in appearance" and that it "probably had been formed against some smooth, relatively flat surface."

On November 27th, at the village of Braughing, 40 miles north of Wandsworth, motorcyclist D. J. Tunmore noticed something white in the blue sky, which he thought at first was a piece of floating paper; it plummeted down and landed on a grass plot only a yard away from him. It was a five-pound block of ice, a foot long and four inches thick. Prof. F. A. Paneth of Durham University, an authority on the chemistry of meteorites, thought this might possibly be an ice meteorite; but he was mistaken, because it is not acceptable that ice meteorites should fall again and again in London and its environs. Two days later, an iceblock 15" x 7" x 4" plunged into a garden at Hampstead Norris, 45 miles west of Wandsworth (AP story in N. Y. *Herald Tribune,* Dec. 1.) On December 3rd, Wandsworth was struck again: a 2-pound block fell on a house there. On the 7th, a schoolboy of High Wycombe, 25 miles west-northwest of Wandsworth, saw a nine-inch-square block shatter on the road near him. On the 21st, a girl named Margaret Paterson, alighting from an "electrical tram car" in Tooting, three miles southeast of Wandsworth, was actually grazed by a falling one-pound iceblock; and on New Year's Day, 1951, a massive chunk of ice knocked a hole three feet wide in the roof of a house at Windsor, approximately halfway between Wandsworth and Hampstead Norris. Finally, on April 7th, an iceblock weighing more than thirty pounds fell in a garden at Purley, ten miles SSE of Wandsworth. (This and the Windsor case are cited in Wilkins's book *Flying Saucers on the Attack,* Citadel Press, 1954, p. 101.)

The falling ice created something of a furor in England. The Government took prompt action: on Nov. 28 the Air Ministry, calling it "one of the biggest mysteries of the century," set up "Project Ice-Bolt" to investigate the sky ice, and asked that all specimens be brought in for examination as soon as found. (Wilkins article, and AP story in N. Y. *News,* Nov. 29.) On Dec. 13, the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Aviation reported in the House of Commons that "There is no evidence that aircraft were involved; it is not considered that meteorological phenomena were responsible; the investigations are being continued." It appears that nothing more was ever published.

But on December 3rd the Ice-Bolt investigators had stated that "the mystery of the ice 'bombs' that fall

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from the sky is solved." Two of the chunks, they said, *"were found to contain scented soap and kitchen waste"* (quoted in UP story, N. Y. *Herald Tribune,* Dec. 5) and had therefore come from "the mundane source of wash basins of passenger aircraft." According to the UP story, "the waste must have frozen in freak air currents before reaching the ground," a thing manifestly absurd; actually, to judge by Wilkins's article, it seems that the Air Ministry investigators' theory was that water sprayed from drainpipes had repeatedly struck against some cold surface of the airplane, thus gradually building up a frozen mass "which may fall when the plane descends lower."

Our information is too scanty to assert positively that this *never* happens, but two facts may be pointed out: (1) In this country, at least, airplanes are *not permitted* to dump waste water or anything else while in flight; yet there have been more ice-falls in the United States than in England; (2) ten days after putting forth this "solution," the Air Ministry was obliged to acknowledge in Parliament that the problem was still unsolved.

The statement that "soap" was present in some specimens is an arresting one. If this was *not* a wash-basin product—and we are entitled to doubt that it was—it seems very likely that this ice that fell from a clear sky over London in 1950 shared the chemical peculiarities of the ice that fell from a clear sky over Texas in 1949. We shall meet them again.

Two years after the English ice-falls, there was another epidemic of falls of ice from a clear sky—this time in France. We must admit that all we know about these incidents may be found on pp. 154-5 of Jimmy Guieu's *Flying Saucers Come From Another World* (English trans. pub. by Hutchinson, 1956); but there is no doubt that they were identical with those of England. On March 26, 1953, for example, at Cintray (about 60 miles west of Paris), Mme. Grimpart heard a prolonged whistling followed by a terrific thud: an iceblock weighing several pounds had fallen a few yards from her. (The incidence of narrow escapes, in these ice-falls, is phenomenal; these iceblocks are lethal, and someone is certainly going to get killed by one before long.) Shortly before this, at Rueil-Malmaison in Paris, an iceblock had torn a limb from a tree as it fell. An engineer named Boclet published a detailed report in the French saucer magazine *Ouranos-Actualité* for May-June, 1953: he concluded that the ice masses (he called them "glasteroids") could not be accounted for either as hailstones or as ice from airplanes. A significant finding was that the ice was frequently *permeated with dirt,* sometimes to the extent of turning it amber-colored. Guieu does not mention whether anyone reported a soapy taste.

For the period 1951-1956 in the United States, our records contain

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eleven instances of falling ice chunks, eight of them in California. The iceblocks punctured roofs, damaged automobiles, and narrowly missed women and children in their gardens—but caused no actual injury. The most remarkable of these was a two-minute fall of about fifty immense "pieces of glass-clear ice," some of them four feet long and weighing 300 pounds, in a two-block area in Long Beach, California, on June 4, 1953. A witness, H. A. Boyd, said he "heard a zizzing sound, looked up, and saw the air full of white stuff coming down." Another witness, Charles Roscoe, aroused by the "gun-blast" sound of the first slabs striking the ground, ran out and looked up to see "the sun shining on big pieces coming from 2,000 feet up. They rolled and twisted and shimmered like a waterfall. I looked for a plane and couldn't see any." These ice-rocks damaged three cars, smashing one so severely that its motor protruded.

So persistent are the stereotyped explanations that even this mammoth shower, which continued for two minutes over a single two-block area and brought down a ton or more of ice, was automatically attributed by local meteorologists to "a high-flying plane"! Not surprisingly, an Air Force spokesman finally denied the possibility of any such origin. (FATE, Nov., 1953, pp. 5-6.)

As this is written, a series of ice-falls in southeastern Pennsylvania and western New Jersey, now four months old, appears to be still in progress. In these four months, at least ten cases of falling ice have occurred, all at places within 75 miles of Reading, Pennsylvania. Thanks to the fortunate circumstance that a consulting chemist living in Reading, Dr. Malcolm J. Reider, had his curiosity aroused, they have been better investigated than any ice-falls since ice-falls began. (Since we are writing at Thanksgiving time, let us also be thankful that the Air Force has not stepped in to make the investigation its own exclusive province and bungle it. The Civil Aeronautics Administration is investigating, but there has been no question of any "security" restrictions.) Most readers of this article have doubtless heard of these falls before: they were mentioned in the February *Fantastic Universe* by Ivan Sanderson, and before that they figured in a series in the Philadelphia *Bulletin* and an admirable review article by Martha Martin in the N. Y. *Sunday News* of Oct. 27, 1957. But what may not have been stressed before is the *chemical* findings of Dr. Reider, which proved to deepen the enigma.

Early in the evening of July 30, 1957, Edwin Groff was watering a plum tree on his farm at Bernville, a few miles northwest of Reading, when he heard "a whooshing noise." He looked up and saw a large, round, white object sailing down at him from the clear southern sky. It was a fifty-pound ice cake two feet in diameter, which crashed and shat-

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tered within a few yards of him. A few seconds later, another one of half the size followed it from the same direction and struck in a flower bed near him and his wife. The Groffs notified a meteorologist in Reading, Dr. Matthew Peacock, who called in Dr. Reider to examine the sky ice.

By the courtesy of Dr. Reider, we have seen his report on this ice. He found it to be rather peculiar stuff. It was cloudy and white from dissolved air (proof of rapid freezing); it was permeated throughout with "sediment"—dust, fibres, algae—and it had a structure which he compared to "a popcorn ball." It was, in fact, a frozen-together mass of hailstones, each stone no larger than one inch in diameter.

The large masses of ice that fall in storms have often been described in similar terms (*e.g.*, Muir of Ord, Dharwar); and this fact has been considered, in the past, as an indication that they did not really fall at all.

It has been assumed that a heap of fallen hailstones, lying in a depression of the ground, became frozen together (a process technically called "regelation") and was found after the storm by astonished rustics, who jumped to the false conclusion that the mass had fallen "ready-made." Regelation on the ground *does* occur (hailstones are often well below freezing temperature), but this Bernville case, whose fall is undisputed, presents us with the astounding fact that it can also take place *in the sky*—and, *nota bene*, in a *clear* sky.

The chemical contaminants of the Bernville ice were not those of terrestrial ice, and not those of hailstones. Iron and nitrate were entirely absent, which is never true of ordinary "ground water" or ice made by rapidly freezing such water; in contrast, salt and other dissolved minerals were present in an amount that would be excessive in drinking water, and the ice was *alkaline*: technically speaking, its pH was 8.8. Alkaline substances have a bitter, flat, soapy flavor—one thinks of the soapy taste of the Texas ice, and the "soap" of the London falls. The ice showed no radioactivity.

Dr. Reider was bewildered by these results. He could only suppose that the ice was atmospherically formed, but "in its genesis had picked up alkaline dust raised from certain arid-alkaline areas of our western states," subsequently being "carried thousands of miles across our country by air streams" to be dropped on Mr. Groff's farm.

This theory found, to put it mildly, no favor with meteorologists. Dr. Peacock pronounced it "poppycock" (Reading *Times*, Aug. 8), and Paul Sutton, chief of the U. S. Weather Bureau at Harrisburg, Pa., said unequivocally that the ice "was not formed by natural processes known to meteorology" (*ibid.*, Aug. 28). The jet stream, relied upon by Reider to deliver the ice, was actually far to the north of Pennsylvania at the time; in any case (as Curtis

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Fuller pointed out in FATE, Dec., 1957), the horizontal jet-stream winds would have no more power to keep ice-cakes aloft than would calm air. Since it was definitely known, according to Sutton, that hail-forming conditions had been absent near Bernville, the meteorologists closed their eyes to Reider's demonstration that the Bernville ice was a mass of fused hailstones, and preferred to suppose that it "must have" fallen from some airplane.

Airline and Air Force spokesmen had to explain again, as others had explained before in England, France, and California, that large ice chunks simply do not form on airplanes, and that planes are not allowed to dump water. A TWA spokesman made the further point that "if this ice were coming from planes, we certainly would have had these occurrences all along." (FATE, Jan., 1958, p. 9) None of these statements was really necessary, since Reider had shown that the ice was chemically and physically quite unlike anything that might be associated with an airplane.

Iceblocks continued to fall in the same area. On the evening of August 14th, at Gowen City (near Shamokin), thirty miles northwest of Bernville, a 25-pound cake fell from a clear sky. Dr. Reider examined it: he reported that it was a cloudy, alkaline mass of fused hailstones, permeated with dirt particles, *chemically almost identical with the Bernville ice.* On the evening of Sept. 8, a mass of more than 100 pounds crashed through the slate roof of an unoccupied house in Chester, Pa., 60 miles southeast of Bernville; just as at Wandsworth, the ice was of milky appearance, and was "smooth and flat on one side" (FATE, Jan., 1958, pp. 6-9.) Four days later, a big chunk fell through the roof of a sheet-metal warehouse in downtown Philadelphia, scaring the workmen: it was described as "rather peculiar-looking: milky, with brown spots in it." (AP story in Newark [N. J.] *Star-Ledger,* Sept. 13.) It now developed also that one morning in April, at Quakertown, forty miles east of Bernville, a block of ice had been seen to crash onto the garage roof of the post office; fortunately, the postmaster had kept a sample in his deep freeze. (Easton, Pa., *Express,* Sept. 23.)

Dr. Reider examined the Chester, Philadelphia, and Quakertown ice-bolts. He found that they were all cloudy masses of hailstones, with alkaline contamination.

In the meantime, sky ice of a different kind had made its appearance. On August 27, at Camp Hill, Pa., fifty miles WSW of Bernville, there had fallen a flat cake of ice which contained the typical alkaline contaminants, but was *not* an aggregation of round hailstones. Instead, it exhibited large hexagonal "columnar crystals, giving it the appearance of a honeycomb." (Easton *Express,* Sept. 23, 27.) As Fort remarked of a similar case, "this is a datum profoundly of the damned"—for it

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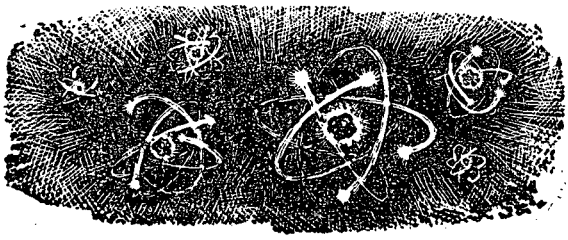
shows that this ice, wherever it had formed, had crystallized *very slowly*, from an undisturbed expanse of water. Again, on Sept. 18, a forty-pound slab was found in a field near Annandale, New Jersey—65 miles ENE of Bernville—and this slab, 3′ x 18″ x 4″, was of the same striking honeycomb structure as that of Camp Hill. Although alkali was, for the first time, absent, the unique crystal structure positively identified this as sky ice, and not the work of a prankster. (Easton *Express*, Sept. 27.)

The description of the Muir of Ord iceblock should be recollected. In all probability, the "diamond-shaped squares" of that ice might more correctly have been called "hexagons."

Since September, there have been three more ice-falls in the Reading area: Mechanicsburg, 10 miles WSW of Camp Hill, October (a flat slab of columnar ice); eastern Philadelphia, Nov. 6 (a ten-pound cloudy chunk); and Belle Mead, N. J., forty miles east of Quakertown, Nov. 12 (a football-shaped mass of clear ice a foot in diameter with a horizontal-layered structure and dirt inclusions) (Philadelphia *Inquirer*, Nov. 7; Somerville [N. J.] *Messenger-Gazette*, Nov. 14.) Dr. Reider's findings on these are not yet available.

What sense can be made of all this? Very little, it must be admitted. Although the patterned repetition of falls around a central point looks purposeful, one can hardly believe that visiting spaceships would choose to drop "popcorn balls" of soapy-flavored ice, in preference to some more intelligible form of message. One might, of course, imagine that they do so *by accident*: that in their comings and goings from space, they punch holes in Fort's aerial ice-fields, knocking fragments loose which fall to the earth far below. Absurd, of course; but what theory of these incredible phenomena is *not* absurd?

All that seems to be certain is this: Large masses of very peculiar ice, such as formerly fell only in violent storms, have for the past eight years or so been tumbling out of the clear blue sky. What invisible upper-air agency is now supplementing the storms in bringing this ice down, nobody knows; but some of us suspect that the coincidence in time between the UFO Age and the Sky-Ice Age may be more than a mere coincidence.



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case history

by . . . Nelson Bond

He'd made up his mind that he would solve the riddle of the UFOs. Nothing must be allowed to interfere!

"CASE 139," said the chief of staff. "John Wilson, white, male, 45. He calls himself the man who solved the Flying Saucer secret. Listen carefully, please. When you have heard him, I'll ask for your suggestions."

He motioned to attendants, who ushered in a short, plump, balding man in beltless slacks and sandals without laces. The chief of staff greeted him gently.

"Mr. Wilson, these doctors are your friends. They want to help you. Will you be good enough to tell them your story?"

John Wilson nodded quietly, stepped to the rostrum and addressed the group.

"Sirs," he said, "I will not waste your time. I will tell you in simple, straightforward fashion how I solved the secret of the Flying Saucers. If there are any questions afterward, I will be glad to answer them.

"At the time I conceived my brilliant scheme I was a bank teller. An uninteresting occupation you will say—not one that calls for great imagination. Yet from my youth I was an imaginative man. An avid reader of fantasies and

Nelson Bond is so much a part of Fantasy and Science Fiction that he needs no introduction to any reader in the field. Here is a unique approach to the question of just what the men (little or otherwise) in Flying Saucers really do want from us as they appear and reappear in all sorts of places.

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science-fiction, I had reached middle-age convinced that life is rich with unsolved mysteries.

"You are aware that a few years ago began a series of inexplicable appearances. In the skies were seen strange objects known as Flying Saucers. So many observations were reported by reputable citizens that governments were forced to concede something unusual was happening. Commissions were appointed to investigate. These groups brought in reports. To their great shame, all claimed the Flying Saucers were merely optical illusions, known heavenly bodies, or runaway balloons.

"These explanations did not satisfy me. They were too pat, too simple. Studying the history of Flying Saucers I discovered that such objects had been sighted for over a hundred years. It became clear that Earth, for many decades, had been under observation by unearthly aliens. Who were these creatures, where they came from, or what they looked like, I had no idea. But I resolved to learn.

"I based my effort on two logical assumptions: that these visitors were intelligent, and that since observation was their purpose, they would be attracted by any unusual action. Obviously, if I could draw my quarry to watch *me,* I could also see *them.* Therefore I determined to make myself uniquely, inescapably, conspicuous.

"Earth's most outstanding artificial landmark is the Empire State Building. I went to this structure, paying an admission fee like any visitor. But where others came to see, I came to be *seen.* To the tower I carried in a suitcase certain attention-compelling props: a crimson cloak similar to that worn by a cartoon character known as Superman; bells and horns of varied pitch and tone; an assortment of rocket flares. These last I selected in varied colors: red, green, purple, orange, not knowing which hues might be most visible to creatures of an alien world.

"I reached the observation tower on a fine, clear morning in midsummer. The sky was blue and cloudless; only a faint breeze stirred. Having reached my destination unchallenged, I committed the only act of violence of which I may be charged. At gunpoint I forced from the platform all others who were there—visitors and guards alike. Then I secured the doorway so I might be alone. I estimated that before I could be evicted from my eyrie I had about thirty minutes to attract those whose attention I sought.

"Alone on the tower, I sprang into action. Putting on the bizarre costume I have mentioned, I climbed from the platform to the tip of the metal spire which rises an additional hundred feet. To this I secured myself with a linesman's belt, then set into action my visible and audible apparatus. Bells rang, a siren howled, lights flashed about me, rockets flared; the sky was dyed

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with a dozen gorgeous hues as I made myself the center of a pyrotechnic display deliberately designed to gain attention.

"I attracted attention quickly enough. But not of those from whom I desired it. The city sprawled beneath me like a concrete web. Its streets swarmed with a huddle of human ants, faces upturned. New York had turned out in mass to witness the suicidal swansong of a madman. But no unearthly visitors appeared.

"At such times as my siren was not wailing or I was not deafened by the clamor of my own bells I could hear men attempting to force the tower door. With battering at first. Then, when that had failed, I heard the hiss of a blowtorch as the door was seared from its hinges. This worried me, for I was well aware that if this attempt failed I would never get another.

"I can bridge the next ten minutes with one word—despair. My effort was in vain. In a moment of over-zealous jangling I dropped my bells. I am sure they struck no one in the crowd below, for I saw a swift circle open in the ring of humanity packing the streets. For this I am grateful, since I had no wish to harm anyone.

"But my bells were gone, my siren battery finally failed, and eventually I exhausted my small stock of flares and Roman candles. I heard voices, and looking down discovered the tower door had been forced. Uniformed men were flooding onto the platform. A tense-jawed man—I presume a professional steeplejack—started climbing the spire toward me. He approached to within fifty feet, then thirty, twenty. As he moved upward he talked desperately, pleading with me to come down quietly and stop being, as he put it, a damned fool.

"Then, at the last minute, when all seemed hopeless—when I was about to unbuckle my belt and tell the advancing man I would follow him down—out of failure came triumph. Scudding across the sky appeared a Flying Saucer. The crowd below loosed a cry of amazement. I heard the gasp of my would-be rescuer, saw him hastily descend the spire, leaving me to my fate.

"But this I saw with only half an eye, for the Saucer was circling closer and closer, until at last I saw a portal open in its side. An alien figure appeared in this opening, gestured to me. I signaled my desire to speak to him. He nodded and drew closer still, bridging the gap between us to mere inches. I unfastened my safety belt, stepped into the Saucer, and—" John Wilson smiled—"you know the rest. I became the first Earthman to make contact with the occupants of a spaceship from the planet Tria of the star Aldebaran."

The speaker paused, glanced hesitantly at the chief of staff, who rose and nodded pleasantly.

"Thank you, Wilson. That will be all for now."

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To those who flanked Wilson he said, "Take him back to his cell."

When the man who solved the Flying Saucer secret was gone, the chief of staff turned again to his associates.

"I am sure," he said, "you have been interested by this narrative, the true case history of the first creature to be brought home to Tria alive from the planet Earth of the star Sol. As you see, theirs is a primitive civilization. But their planet is greatly to our liking. Now that we have successfully contacted one member of their race and can learn from him those things which we have been trying to discover over a period of decades, I believe we can proceed more swiftly toward our goal of occupation."

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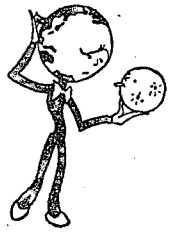

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full quota

by . . . William F. Nolan

She pointed the umbrella at him and he winced. The fire and brimstone had upset him enough. What was due next?

GEORGE MEDHURST sighed when he heard the familiar footsteps from the hall. The heavy tread, the brief pause at the office door, the old school knock: All horribly familiar.

He swore, shoved the latest body under his desk, and picked up the automatic. It was, of course, still warm.

"Come in."

The door crashed open and a huge man charged across the room. Skidding to a halt before Medhurst, he skimmed a rolled newspaper across the desk. "Touchdown!" he bellowed, smiling broadly.

Medhurst failed to return the smile. He sat unmoving, tipped back in the swivel-chair, his mouth a hard line. He said nothing.

"Doncha remember me, Georgie? Chuck! Your ole college pal, Charles J. Fuller. Remember?"

"How could I forget you, Chuck?" Medhurst spoke evenly, one hand on the gun in his coat pocket.

Fuller swung an arm like a walking beam and punched Medhurst affectionately on a shoulder already bruised by just such affectionate punches. "Why, you ole porcupine!"

William Nolan, prominent in SF circles in the West, will be remembered for his grim SMALL WORLD, *(F. U., August 1957). Here is a completely different story—we are tempted to say a cheerfully different story—about a woman who had a quota to fill, a strange and terrible human quota. . . .*

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He arched his massive head, surveying the plushly furnished office. "Damn, boy, ya went an' made a pile I see." He moved toward one of the deep, maroon-leather chairs.

"Don't sit down," said Medhurst softly.

"Why the hell not?" demanded Fuller. He jammed a cigar into his mouth and fumbled for a match. "What's the idea, Georgie?"

"And don't light that cigar. There isn't time."

"Time?" Fuller squinted at his old friend. "Time for what?"

"Look, Chuck," began Medhurst in the quiet, authoritative tone of a family physician, "in a moment I'm going to point a gun at you. Please don't say: 'Put that thing down, Georgie!' or: 'Are ya *nuts,* chum?' because I'm sick to death of hearing you say these things. All that I ask for, this time, is a bit of simple variety in your reaction."

Fuller's pugilistic features were knotted in open amazement. "If this is some kinda joke, Georgie, then I don't get it."

"You're about to," said Medhurst, squeezing the trigger of the automatic.

The falling body nearly upset the water cooler, causing Medhurst to reflect that it was better, after all, to let Fuller sit down. Next time he would not object.

George held his breath for a long moment, listening. Fine. No one had heard the shot; the silencer had proven quite effective. In this type of situation, however, nothing must be taken for granted. Satisfied, George inserted another bullet in the clip, and put the gun back in the desk.

What a rough day! Six bodies already this morning, and it was only 11:30. Well, time for lunch. He didn't feel particularly hungry, but some fresh air would do him a lot of good.

Still, this latest body presented a problem. He couldn't chance leaving it in plain sight, but the office closet was packed solid. He had four in there as it was. And the space under his desk could only accommodate one. The only solution was the hall closet, but dragging Fuller in there was a risky procedure. Well, thought Medhurst, here we go.

He froze at the sound of footsteps mounting the stairs.

The police? No, not likely. And it wasn't Fuller. Heart pounding, Medhurst eased to the door. A distant clatter of buckets and brushes settled the matter. It was the cleaning woman.

"That you, Mrs. Yancy?" Medhurst called out.

"Tis me, indeed, an' nobody else," a cheery voice answered him from the hall.

Medhurst relaxed. Thank heaven for Mrs. Yancy. Spanking fresh from the Old Country, with an ingrained belief in "ghosts and ghouls and things that go bump in the night," the little red-faced cleaning woman was his sole confidant in this mad business. Medhurst regard-

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ed her with genuine affection as she entered his office.

"Thought I saw that Mr. Fuller in the lobby," said Mrs. Yancy. "Did ya . . ."

"I did," replied Medhurst, indicating the new body near the cooler.

"That's five today, ain't it, sir?"

"Six," Medhurst corrected.

"Faith, an' they're pilin' up!"

"I was just about to drag this one to the hall closet. I'm full up in here."

"Leave this one ta me, sir. You just go along ta lunch."

"Well . . ." He smiled and patted her lightly on the arm. "Are you sure you can manage it?"

"Like nothin" a'tall." She waved him on.

"All right. I'll be back in forty minutes or so. And—if Fuller shows up, have me paged. I'll be at the Brite Spot Cafe."

Mrs. Yancy nodded, crossed herself, and leaned over the body of Charles J. Fuller.

Anyway, thought Medhurst in the elevator, not a one of them had bled. That was a concession he certainly appreciated. Of course, the next one might bleed. No telling, so he figured he'd better eat while he still had the stomach for it; the sight of blood had always sickened him.

At the cafe, Medhurst ordered fruit salad, a grilled-cheese sandwich and black coffee. He had just taken his first swallow of coffee when a meaty hand slapped him violently on the back.

Charlie Fuller stood above him, grinning like an ape.

"Hiya, Georgie! Betcha don't remember your ole college chum!"

Medhurst was stunned. During the entire seven days this was the first time he'd encountered Fuller outside the office. Which meant that the Old Lady was getting worried, using stronger methods to force his surrender. Just seven more days, and he could win. He *had* to hold on.

"You don't look so good, Georgie," Fuller remarked, pulling up a chair. "Ain't life been good ta ya? I hear yer loaded nowdays."

The only trouble was, Medhurst's interior monologue continued, he had only ten minutes in which to kill Fuller. And that wasn't time enough to get Charlie upstairs and into his office. He cursed himself for failing to bring along the automatic. He could have maneuvered Fuller into the rest room and . . .

Medhurst felt the sweat break out on the palms of his hands, and he could almost *hear* his wrist watch ticking away the vital seconds.

And then he remembered the vial of poison in the glove compartment of his Ford.

"Well, by God, Chuck!" he improvised desperately. "It's great to see you. We—we've got a thousand things to talk about—school—football—the old home town . . ." He paused, searched through his pockets. "Say, I forgot my cigs. Better

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hop down to the drugstore and pick up a pack. Back in two shakes."

"Hold up, chum," grinned Fuller. "You can bum some off me."

"Oh, no, Charlie," protested Medhurst, "I smoke an imported brand. Ruins your taste for American tobacco. Just hold the fort. I won't be over five minutes."

I can't afford to be, Medhurst told himself; that would be trimming things too fine.

Outside, in the bright flare of noon sunlight, Medhurst checked his wrist watch. A block to the parking lot, a block back. If he ran both ways he could just make it! Darting between a startled mother and child, he whipped across the intersection on the orange light and sprinted for the car.

When he reached the Ford he was trembling with exhaustion. Lord, what a few extra years can do to a man's wind. He found the vial, tissue-wrapped and safe, inside the glove compartment. Ah! One pinch of this colorless powder in Fuller's coffee and the big man would fall victim to an instant "heart attack." Once absorbed into the bloodstream, the poison defied detection. Extremely difficult to obtain, but worth every penny.

Medhurst was beginning to regain his confidence on the way back to the cafe when he slammed full-tilt into a fellow pedestrian. "Pardon me," George mumbled, attempting to duck around and continue his run.

But a pair of beefy hands gripped the lapels of his coat, and a bull-throated voice shouted: "Why, you ole porcupine! It's Georgie Medhust! Remember me, chum. I'm—"

"I *know* who you are!" raged Medhurst, shaking himself free. "And I don't give a damn anymore." He turned his back on a gaping Charles Fuller and headed for the lot.

The Old Lady had won.

"Hey, Georgie, ya crazy fool! It's me, yer ole college pal, Charlie Fuller. Where ya runnin' off ta? Hey, Georgie, WAIT UP!"

Medhurst ignored the cries. It was no longer any use to resist, and George knew it. So let's get it all over with, he thought.

He snapped away the vial of poison and slid wearily behind the wheel of the Ford.

The San Francisco noon traffic was almost impossible to navigate with any degree of speed and George Medhurst blared his horn in a useless effort to clear a path. Once past the heart of the city, however, he swung off Market, picked up some headway on Fell, and made his final turn at Van Ness. According to the slip of paper in his wallet, the Old Lady would be waiting for him in the lobby of the New Central Hotel. He parked in the Fox lot opposite the building and crossed over.

The Old Lady was sitting in the small, dusty lobby, reading a fashion magazine. Medhurst walked slowly to her chair.

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"So, George, you've decided to accept my terms," she said, without raising her eyes from the page.

Standing above her, like I am, Medhurst thought, you'd swear she was somebody's sweet ole grandmother. Soft white hair in a bun, smile-wrinkles in her cheeks, incredibly dainty hands—but, God, when she *looks* at you . . .

Medhurst shuddered, the cat-brightness of her eyes now full upon him.

"I must admit you've set a new record, George. A full week. In somewhat similar circumstances one of Cesare Borgia's political advisors held out for six days—and then went insane, proving of no use whatever. You have shown truly remarkable perseverance and are to be congratulated."

George Medhurst said nothing.

"Are you quite ready to cooperate in full?"

"Yes," replied Medhurst, "providing you call off the Charlie Fullers."

"Of course. No more will appear."

"What about the two I left?"

"Gone," sighed the Old Lady. "Like smoke up a flue." The fashion magazine on her lap vanished instantly to illustrate her point. She pointed a delicate ivory finger at Medhurst. "In fact, George, the only thing you have to worry about now—" and she paused to smile horribly "—is pleasing me."

One week ago, George Medhurst had worried only about pleasing an important out-of-town customer. The cutting and polishing of precious stones is a precise, exacting profession, and although he was recognized as an outstanding craftsman in his field, each new job presented fresh problems. He was in the midst of some of these problems when he heard a light tapping at the office door.

He opened it to a snow-haired old lady in a knit shawl. Under the shawl, her dress was fire-truck red, and she carried a long black umbrella.

"Young man," she fluted, "I require your assistance."

"Have you an appointment, madam?" asked Medhurst. "My secretary is out for the moment and unless you have—"

"Of *course* I don't have an appointment," snapped the elderly woman.

Medhurst smiled. "I'm afraid you'll have to check with my secretary when she returns. You see, I'm quite busy and—"

Suddenly the room seemed to detonate in his face. In a kaleidoscopic swirl of white-haired old ladies George felt himself lifted and tossed like a beach ball. He squinted up from the office floor, wiping dust from his eyes.

"We're under attack!" he gasped.

"Posh," said the old lady, who was now standing above Medhurst. "That was simply a mild dose of fire and brimstone. Just to let you know I mean business." She leaned

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over, extending her umbrella. "Here, George, grab my bumbershoot and I'll help you regain your equilibrium."

"I'll regain my own damn equilibrium!" Medhurst snorted, waving the umbrella aside.

"You'll want to know who I am if we're to work together," the old woman said. "My name is . . . oh, bother! What *is* my name?"

"Lady, I'm damn well sure *I* wouldn't know," replied Medhurst, reaching for the phone. But I'll bet the police do, he thought.

"Hello, operator?" he said into the phone, watching the old lady, fearful that she might have another stick of dynamite hidden.

"Sit down, George, and stop all this nonsense!" a thin, metallic voice commanded from the phone.

"Omigawd!" said Medhurst, dropping the receiver. "A ventriloquist!" He sat down.

"Now then . . ." She seated herself, placing the black umbrella across her lap like a pointed musket. "I suppose you are wondering just why I'm here."

"That's putting it mildly."

"Well, I'm topside with a quota to meet, and I've selected you to help me fill it. You see, I'm due back with no less than fifty souls by 3 p.m. on the 28th of August, which is just fourteen days, two hours and—" She consulted an ancient timepiece pinned to her bosom. "—twenty-three minutes from now. So you see, we have no time to waste."

Logic, Medhurst said to himself. The calm application of logic and common sense is the layman's best method of dealing with a lunatic.

"What you are telling me," said George, "is that you are a devil sent from Hell with a certain deadline to meet. Is that it?"

"I do not approve of the term 'Hell,'" she informed him stiffly. "Since one must attach labels, I would much prefer to speak of it as The Nether Region."

"Granted. But if you are what you are, why have you chosen a decrepit old lady's body to work in?"

She was plainly annoyed at his question. "I died in this body three thousand years ago and I refuse to give it up. I have only had it overhauled twice in all these years."

"Well," said George, stubbornly applying more logic, "all the devils I've ever heard of were male—with horns and hooves and long spiked tails. How do you explain this?"

"A popular misconception!" she snapped. "Of course there are female devils—the reason is obvious—and most of us dress in good taste. We believe in brightness, but not gaudy sensationalism. We conduct ourselves with dignity. It's always the young male devils who insist on making such disgraceful spectacles of themselves." She ruffled the lace at her collar indignantly. "Wonder to me they ever manage to bring back any souls at all, what with the terrible commotion and fuss they stir up."

Medhurst could see that he was

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losing ground; he decided to launch a more direct line of questioning. "Just how could I help you . . . fill your quota?"

"You have access to many of the nation's most precious stones."

"I do special cutting and polishing for a number of wealthy customers if that's what you mean," George admitted. "But what have precious stones to do with souls?"

"Wealth is the captor of the soul," the old woman stated. "And a precious stone is its most perfect cage. Not all stones, of course, are of value to me. I want only those whose histories are written in blood, for whose possession men have schemed and murdered. Honor, conscience, integrity and reputation must have been sacrificed in their taking. Such stones as these carry as many as six or more souls, trapped within. With your aid, I intend to take a bag of them home with me. Will you cooperate?"

"And what if I won't?" Medhurst demanded, convinced that common sense was useless. "What if I decide that you're as cookoo as a clock and call the police?"

The old lady shook her head. "I see that stronger measures are in order."

"What do you mean?"

"At 9 a.m. tomorrow morning," said the old woman, "Charles J. Fuller will appear in your office."

"I haven't seen Chuck for years," Medhurst stated. "Last I heard he was back in New York, married and settled down."

"Well, he'll be here in the morning, promptly at 9 a.m. You will have just ten minutes in which to kill him."

"Now, wait a minute!"

"If you do not kill him, by 9:10 he will suddenly become violent and kill *you*—which would be a terrible waste." She handed him a slip of paper. "I'll be at this address when you wish to see me."

Medhurst took the paper.

"If, after you have disposed of the first body," the old woman went on, wrapping her shawl more securely about her thin shoulders, "you still persist in your childish attitude, I shall send other Mr. Fullers. You will have just ten minutes in each case before they turn violent. Good day, George."

The next morning, after he had dismissed his secretary for the day, George Medhurst sat nervously in his office, unable to concentrate on his work. He glanced repeatedly at the desk clock. He was convinced that the old lady was a loony, but he had determined not to call the police until after 9 a.m. Then he could be *certain* the old gal was not what she claimed to be.

The minutes ticked slowly away. 8:56 8:57 8:58 8:59 Footsteps . . .

A knock.

Medhurst stiffened in his chair. "Come in."

A huge, familiar figure burst into the office. "Hiya, Georgie! Betcha don't even remember yer ole pal!"

It was Charlie Fuller.

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They shook hands and Fuller lit a cigar and settled into a leather chair. Medhurst still refused to believe.

They exchanged school memories, laughed together at old jokes, slapping one another on the back. Then Fuller suddenly stopped smiling. "What time is it, George?'

"9:10," said Medhurst, eyeing his friend tensely.

"Then, I'm sorry, chum, but—" Fuller lunged across the desk at Medhurst, a gleaming length of steel in his right hand. George caught the knife-arm in mid-thrust and they crashed to the floor.

The fight was brief and savage. Medhurst managed to wrest the knife from Fuller and stab him fatally.

George stumbled to his feet and reached for the phone. Wait! He paused, one hand on the receiver. To anyone else, this would look like murder.

Another knock on the door—a perfunctory knock before the knob began to turn. The cleaning woman!

"NO!" Medhurst shouted at the opening door. "DON'T COME IN NOW!"

"But I was too late," said George to the Old Lady one week later, in the lobby of the New Central Hotel.

"And after she saw the body?"

"I told her the truth. All about you. And, strangely enough, she believed every word. She's Irish, just over from the Old Country."

"What kept you from going directly to me after the first Mr. Fuller was taken care of?"

"I was ready to come," Medhurst confessed, "but she talked me out of it. She figured that if I could hold out until the 28th, your deadline, then you'd have to go back to the Nether Region, and that would be that. She even offered to help me with the bodies as they piled up, and loaned me her brother's automatic equipped with a silencer."

"A remarkable woman, your Mrs. Yancy."

Medhurst could not meet the Old Lady's piercing eyes; he felt weak and exhausted. "There is still one thing I don't understand," he said.

"Well?"

"Why did you go to all this trouble, waste all this time, on my account? You duplicated Charlie Fuller easily enough. Why didn't you simply produce a duplicate of me and let *it* do your work?"

The Old Lady chuckled, a sound like dry grass in the wind, and replied: "It's true that I am able to create duplicate humans, instilling in them certain primary drives. But, lacking souls, they fail to interest me as working partners."

"What about my own soul?" Medhurst demanded. "Since I'm now a murderer twenty times over you'll claim it too!"

"Our code is quite rigid," said the Old Lady. "We must show legitimate grounds for claiming a soul. You have killed only pseudo-humans. The real Charles Fuller is

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alive and well at this moment back in New York. Thus, I have no grounds on which to take your soul." She smiled at Medhurst. "You are, in fact, disgustingly innocent."

Medhurst relaxed. "Well, let's get started. I want to get this business over with."

"Of course." The Old Lady removed a small, carefully-wrapped packet from her shawl. She handed it to Medhurst. "Unwrap this, please."

"The Wainwright Star Sapphire!" George exclaimed, examining the fabulous stone with exacting care.

"Your job is to bring me the real stone and leave this one in its place."

"You may as well ask for the crown jewels of Europe," Medhurst protested, appalled by the task she proposed.

"Those," chuckled the Old Lady, folding her ivory hands carefully in her lap, "will come later."

On the 28th of August, at 2:55 p.m., George Medhurst handed over the last stone.

"You've done well, George. I'm very pleased with you." The Old Lady patted a sizable bag of jewels into place under her shawl.

Medhurst had aged ten years; his hair was grayer, his face drawn and pale. "You'd better hurry," he urged, desperately anxious to be finally rid of her. "You'll miss your deadline."

"I have a few minutes remaining," she said. "You asked me once why I didn't make a duplicate of you and send it for the jewels."

"You told me why."

"Ah, yes, but you should have asked me why I didn't go myself. I could have, you know." Her eyes were coldly luminous, like things in a cave.

"Then . . . why *didn't* you go?" Medhurst asked, his throat suddenly dry. He drew a cup of water from the cooler.

"Because I knew of only forty-nine souls, all told, remaining in jewels here in America. I needed fifty to fill my quota."

"But—you can't claim mine!" Medhurst gasped. "You said so yourself. That you needed grounds, that I was innocent. Remember? You told me that my soul was safe . . ."

"And so it was—*then*," grinned the Old Lady. "But then was then and now is now, George. In the last seven days I have amassed considerable data on which to legitimately claim your soul. Under my prompting, but of your own free will, you, George Medhurst, have become the world's greatest jewel thief!"

George Medhurst dropped dead to the floor, and the Old Lady deftly caught his soul in her lace hankie as it left the body.

The paper cup which fell from Medhurst's hand had contained more than water.

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microcosm

by . . . Stanton A. Coblentz

What, really, is an atom? Once it has been isolated, can you then discover what life on this atom is like?

DR. J. HARRINGTON RHYS, the world-famous psychiatrist, sat at his desk, one hand fumbling absently at his Van Dyke beard, the other tapping with his pen against a pad of paper. Opposite him, fidgeting restlessly, a bespectacled scholarly-looking man of about fifty-five sat with a brow-wrinkling concentration.

"How long, Professor Orton, did you say the whole adventure lasted?"

Orton screwed up his thin lips wrily, and drew a moist overheated hand across his domed brow. He sighed.

"I hope you won't think it proves extreme derangement, Doctor, when I tell you it lasted a few seconds at most."

"How do you know?"

"The clock, Doctor. I tested it afterwards. It was running perfectly. When the experience began, it pointed to 5.14. When it was over, it still pointed to 5.14."

The psychiatrist made some notations on his pad.

"Yet the whole affair seemed to go on for a long while?"

"That doesn't begin to express it, Doctor. Not simply a long while.

There is a temptation, not entirely unjustified, to write that Coblentz belongs to the era when Science Fiction was young. Or at least younger. And perhaps we may ask ourselves whether there isn't reason to regret the loss of that sense of wonder which was so much a part of SF in those days.

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Milleniums, ages, epochs, eons—time almost unending!"

Dr. Rhys grunted. "Humph! Humph! . . . A characteristic of the dream experience."

"But this wasn't a dream experience, Doctor. That's what has me startled. If it had happened to anyone else—"

"Come, come, you're getting unduly excited," soothed the unemotional voice of the psychiatrist, as his patient arose and began to range a little uncertainly about the room. "Just sit down, and tell me about it all, as slowly and calmly as you can."

"If I told you about it all," resumed Orton, as he slipped back into a seat, "we'd both be sitting here at the turn of the next century. There's too much to repeat—even to remember. Many of the lesser details are growing faint already. In any case, I might give you an outline."

"Yes, you'll find that will relieve your mind."

While Dr. Rhys continued to make notations, his visitor hesitantly began.

"You know, of course, that I hold the Chair of Atomic Physics at Northcott University. Maybe you're acquainted with my books, *The Worlds Within the Proton,* and *Speculations Concerning Sub-Nuclear Dimensions.* The atom has been my lifelong obsession. It's my view that its real nature has not been penetrated by modern science. That's why I've been experimenting for years with my Amplified Electro-Photostatic method of atomic investigation— But possibly you don't follow me, Doctor?"

"Afraid I don't."

"Well, we needn't go into details. The essence of it is that, by means of an electrically produced amplification of millions of diameters, I can actually obtain the image of an atom and its component parts —not, of course, with the eye, since it is in too rapid movement, but with a photographic exposure measured by millionths of inches. Needless to say, the process is immensely involved. It was not until last Friday that I crowned the labor of years."

"But Friday—wasn't that when you had the adventure?"

"That's right, Doctor. But let me go on. I had just developed the plates. Those minute spots, no bigger than fly specks, wouldn't have meant much to anyone else. But to me they were the constellations of new skies—glimmers from new universes. For the first time, I was exploring the actual atom. You may look upon me as a cut-and-dried physicist, Doctor, but I tell you that what I felt was poetic ecstasy. 'Oh, if those atoms could only be expanded,' I thought, 'so that I might see them for what they actually are! Or if I might shrink to their size!' And no sooner had this desire come to me than the experience began."

"But just then, you say, you glanced at the clock on the labora-

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tory table, and saw that the time was 5.14?"

"Yes, I was due home at 5.30. I'd promised Muriel to be back then, as we were going out for dinner—which was in the background of my mind as I noted the time. But suddenly everything—everything was swept away."

Orton tapped nervously against the back of his chair; sighed; and hesitantly went on.

"I had the impression of being blown far away, through immense spaces. I could not see or hear; I could only feel, as you sometimes do in dreams. After a long while, something began to emerge, like a ship-lamp in a fog. At first it was vague, indefinable, a mere patch of light; but gradually it gathered into a point, reminding me of starshine through a receding mist. The resemblance deepened when, after an enormous time, other lights appeared, whole constellations, dim and glittering against a black canopy of sky. Toward one of these lights I went drifting; and in the course of days or weeks it brightened into a white sunlike orb, around which several smaller orbs were rotating.

"A sort of miniature Solar System?" prompted the doctor, as Orton sat mopping his brow in uncertainty.

"No, there was nothing miniature about it. The proportions seemed astronomical. It *was* a Solar System. After a flight that seemed to take years, I reached one of the smaller orbs, whose surface spread beneath me gigantically, draped in thick clouds that screened out the terrible blaze of the white sun. I sank through the clouds, and reached the surface—if you can give the name surface to that mass of spouting volcanoes, seething geysers, fountains of steam, and lakes and rivers of lava."

"How were you able to endure those high temperatures?" inquired Dr. Rhys, his trained voice and placid, polished manner excluding all suggestion of skepticism.

"I had no sense of heat or cold—no physical sensations at all. I was—well, as you might imagine a disembodied spirit to be. Shall I proceed?"

Dr. Rhys nodded.

"I ranged for thousands of miles across that world's surface—at least, so it seemed—and found it everywhere the same: viscid, eruptive, boiling. I watched for ages—"

"You mean, it felt like ages?"

"It *was* ages. Duration piled upon duration, minute after minute, day after day, year after years, century after century—I tell you, it was never-ending, eternity itself, and I a lonely exile in eternity. I counted the sunrises and sunsets until they numbered into the thousands, and then I lost track, but there were thousands more *thousands of thousands*. However, at last there came a change."

"A sudden change?"

"No, very gradual. Almost imperceptible. I lived through whole lifetimes—hundreds of lifetimes—

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before I noticed that the surface of the planet was cooling. Volcanic upheavals were less common. Settled land, in the form of mudbanks, began to appear. The waters, still hot but no longer boiling, were condensing into seas—seas covered perpetually with steamy fogs. And in those waters, after whole new cycles, small wriggling forms finally began to be seen—wormlike, minute, hideous. But in time they grew, and gave rise to shelled things, and jelly creatures with many tentacles, and even something that resembled a fish. Watching all this grow was like fixing your eyes on the seedling of a sequoia and following it until it became a tree large enough to drive a stagecoach through. Only it all occurred more slowly than this—infinitely more slowly."

"The time sense," reflected Dr. Rhys, as he tapped absently against his pad, "offers problems as yet not fully explored by psychology. But finally all that changed, too?"

"Yes, finally all that changed. Those sea creatures, as you might have expected, ended by coming out on land. They sprouted legs, they grew wings, they evolved into the most grotesque assortment of horrors. Of course, plant life had been developing simultaneously, until the swamps were filled with a green scum, and a rank fernlike vegetation covered all the higher reaches of the land. I tell you, I was living through a nightmare, with armored monstrosities waddling out of the marshes, flying things with crocodile snouts, and whale-sized browsing hulks of gray flesh capped by absurd tiny beads of heads. . . .

"Other ages went by. I hesitate, Doctor, to say how many; all that I had gone through before seemed short by comparison. But a time came when the goblin population had disappeared. The fernlike jungle had given place to forests of stately trees; furry creatures roamed those forests; and feathered things flitted through the air. And finally my eyes fell on a brute that walked on two legs."

"A brute, you say?"

"One of the ugliest. He was much more ungainly than most of the beasts. His hair was thick, tangled and dirty; his low, slanting, ridged forehead and small crafty eyes hadn't much to recommend them. I listened to his raucous voice as he chattered or quarreled; and I followed him through thousands of generations, until he came down from the trees and lived in caves and holes in the ground, and then in rude brush shelters. After a long time, I thought I saw the first gleam of nobility on the brow of this two-footed animal."

Panting with the excitement of his narration, the speaker paused. Dr. Rhys, cool and impassive as always, sat regarding him quizzically. "And you saw all this plainly?"

"As plainly as I see you here. I wish I could make you understand the thousands of details that came

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flocking to my senses: the look of the ape-man, his long brawny arms and barrel chest; the glossy blackness of the hair on his chest and shoulders; the peculiar bawling cry he gave when angry, the whimpering of his young, the screams and whining of the females; the fetid odors of the cave habitations; the mumbo-jumbo of the wizened old medicine-men as they made their miracles with the seeds of thistles and the entrails of deer; the slim, glittering looks of the huntsmen's shafts, the reek of poisoned arrows—"

"Have you done much reading on anthropology, sir?" the psychiatrist interrupted, sharply.

"None at all, so far as I can remember."

"Well, you know that sometimes old impressions, buried in the subconscious— However, go on. And try to condense."

"I'll do my best, although the story couldn't be compressed into volumes. The ape-thing developed; picked up the art of kindling fire; picked up the art of planting food, and of making the other animals serve him; and slowly developed villages and tribal settlements. But all the world wasn't great enough for that ape-creature. And soon, although there was room for all, he began to fight his fellow apes for possession of the planet. Some bold leader at last had the idea that spears and poisoned arrows, which up to now had been used only against the other beasts, might also be valuable against his own species in order to take what they would not otherwise give up. And so one day I watched the saddest affair in the planet's history. Only three victims were killed, and four injured. But it marked the supreme catastrophe. It was the beginning of warfare."

Dr. Rhys' only comment was an encouraging grunt. After a moment, the patient resumed.

"Ages and ages more went by, while I was filled alternately with joy and despair at the growth of that two-legged beast. For thousands of years he spread out; he multiplied; he crossed mountains, prairies, and seas; he populated continents; he built cities; he founded nations and empires. But all the while I didn't know whether to feel more admiration or disgust. He was a strange compound; the mire of the marshes and the sunlight of the peaks mingled in him; he was a mixture of the blind earth-creature nuzzling through the dirt and the iridescent being shimmering high in air. On the one hand, I viewed his radiant accomplishments: his craglike towers; his white gleaming blade of science; his glories of art and song. And I looked on great aspirations, heroic deeds, noble effort, courageous attainment; I followed the doughty unrecorded actions of obscure thousands; the heart-wringing battles, the self-sacrifice, the sturdy toil.

"But on the other hand, I saw an avaricious beast. I saw a monster

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who cared for nothing but what he could stuff down the maw of his flabby body, or use to bolster his steel spine of pride. I saw how he waged twofold war: against his own species, and against the planet. And the war against the planet, though less spectacular, seemed the more devastating: for this blind brute, in his lust to enrich himself, was stripping bare the globe on which the riches of all depended. He wasted the soil; he sheared off the forests; he slew his fellow beasts in the fields, the woods, and the waters. And in his destructiveness he was aided by great machines, which tore the green living tissue of the planet, and left scars that time itself could not erase.

"But this creature was no kinder to himself than to his world. With a demon's ingenuity, he planned instruments to rack, tear and scorch living flesh; bolts to batter down walls and cities; fiery missiles so swift that none could see or hear them; explosives that made the slaughter not only wholesale but indiscriminate. I tell you, Doctor, I felt that I was watching a race of maniacs as I saw war after war burn across the continents, leaving trails of red and black, each more terrible than the last, until half the planet lay in ashes, and the other half in tears. What were these conflicts all about? I didn't know. I couldn't even imagine. They were things apart from sense, like the torrential forces of nature: the flood, the earthquake, the cyclone. And as I watched them blazing, it seemed to me that the rage and terror would never end."

The psychiatrist's smile was faint, and vaguely indulgent. "But they did end at last?"

"Yes, they did end at last. First, however, a change came in the nature of my experience. All through those interminable ages, I had been an aloof, outside observer, merely drifting above—no sharer in the events I witnessed. But now I came to play a direct role."

"How so?"

"That was the weirdest part of it all, Doctor. If you'll have patience, I'll try to explain."

Orton hesitated; got up and strode two or three times about the room; sat down and lit a cigarette; and then, picking his words with difficulty, went on.

"First I seemed to be one of a group debating somewhere in a great paneled hall. I saw myself in a mirror as gray-headed and gray-bearded; I wore a many-starred uniform decorated with blazing disks of metal. There was fury in my mind, and a hard resolution; but there was exultation, a perfect passion of exultation. I was speaking in some foreign tongue; but if the meaning of the individual words was not clear to me, the sense of the whole was absolutely plain. You know what I mean, Doctor?"

"All understanding need not be in words," nodded the psychiatrist.

"Well, I was addressing a group, some of them uniformed like my-

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self, others clothed in glossy ceremonial black-and-white suits. All were listening with the closest interest and respect. I was their leader, and my word was law. My mind, as I spoke, framed visions of something like a long streaking comet approaching through the night skies, then bursting with a volcanic roar, and spewing all the heavens with fire. I thought of a device—I didn't know or understand all the details—that sent great masses of meteoric madness hurtling out of space like a cosmic bombardment. Thinking of the terror, the disruption this would cause, I smacked my lips; I clutched the hilt of a little jeweled dagger, and swung it aggressively; I swore that we would hurl the attack as a surprise for the enemy. There were some protests; several of my associates shuddered, arguing that the missiles would strike back at us; others called them immoral; all of them cautioned that cosmic warfare, being something new to history, should be attempted slowly if at all. But I scoffed at their doubts; I pointed out that the only morality was that of power. Power! Power was the word! How I felt the pride and swagger of my own might as I overruled all objections and decreed in favor of the new warfare! I felt myself to be a god. I could legislate for the planet; my every utterance spelled destiny or doom! . . .

"Then, Doctor, a change came over the scene. I was no longer the puffed-up creature, bristling in uniform. I was dressed in shabby, worn clothes; a workman's tools were in my hands. My arms and legs ached from the day's toil as I plodded down a cobbled street, lined on both sides with ancient-looking tenements of grayish crumbly brick. I slouched into a dank, ill-smelling court, down which soiled streams of water were trickling. I panted up some stairs, and entered a dingy room with cracked plaster, and one small window looking out across a wilderness of walls toward the light-streaked evening sky. A pale, pinched woman with big frightened eyes met me; she spoke to me in words that I didn't understand in themselves, just as I hadn't understood the words of the military leader. But again the meaning was clear. It was a message of terror. There were rumors of some dreadful new weapon; rumors that the enemy might attack at any time—and hadn't we been through enough already, with the starvation rations, the ceaseless drudgery, the many alarms, the dread of the thought police, and, hardest of all, the loss of our eldest boy during the last sky attack? But now my wife was more afraid than ever.

"I too was afraid, as I fondled our three-year-old girl and her five-year-old brother. I wondered if they would grow up, like us, harassed by almost daily fear of destruction. I wondered if it were true, as some said, that the planet faced annihilation. I thought that there would be no loss in the doom of a world

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whose people were constantly fighting, terrorizing one another, slashing, burning, and dismembering one another. Just the same, I clung to life, though as far back as I could remember—and it seemed a long, long time—there had been nothing for me but back-breaking labor, famine and dread."

"You mean, you identified yourself so thoroughly with the worker that you seemed to possess his whole life's memories?"

"Exactly."

"Yet the language of his speech and thought was strange to you, so that you didn't know the meaning of his words?"

"That's just it, Doctor."

"H'm. H'm," mumbled the psychiatrist. And then, in low tones, half as if to himself, "Curious. Most curious. Do you want to proceed?"

"Of course. However, I'm now approaching the hardest part of my story to tell. As I was sitting with the woman and the two children in that dingy room—evidently some time had passed, for we were eating a scanty meal, and all was dark outside, except for the lights in the long, high rows of tenements opposite—a strange whining sound came from far away. It was a sound that simply can't be described—like the wailing of a wild beast, but with a long-drawn mournful quality as if it held a whole world's terror and despair. No wonder it frightened us all; while the children began to whimper and the woman blew out the smoky oil lamp on the table. At the same time, all the lights went out in all the other tenements.

"The sound was one I had often heard before; but somehow I knew it was different this time. On other occasions that sound had sent us all rushing to shelters below; but the refuges had been so small that people had been crushed or suffocated; and their use had lately been forbidden. So we simply shuddered, and stayed where we were."

"Let me ask a question, Professor. You went through some air raids in the last war?"

"None at all."

"Well, perhaps you've read too much about them, or heard stories of eye-witnesses—"

"No, my mind has been on other things entirely. Besides, what I'm about to describe isn't like an air raid. Not any kind I've ever heard of."

Dr. Rhys made some further notations on his pad; and Orton, after lighting another cigarette, went on.

"First there were some peacock plumes of light in the western sky. They would have been beautiful, in an eerie way, if they hadn't been terrifying. They rapidly expanded, and turned into purple-red and gray-blue blotches of prodigious illumination. Then weird rays, like searchlight streamers, began playing across the heavens—flickering orange, fire-tinted violet, flame-yellow, and the ghastly white of magnesium flares. As an exhibition, it would have been something to remember; but

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I didn't think of it as an exhibition as I crouched in that narrow room, huddled against my wife and children, listening to the increasing rumbling that dinned through the sky, and the screams and wailings from all about us.

"But this was only the beginning. After a long while, the heavens suddenly split open. Yes, split open as if a gigantic knife had ripped them! I saw a slash of bloody red that clove through the zenith and tore a jagged hole in the cloud curtain halfway down to the eastern horizon. At the same time, the upper heavens vomited glaring crimson and scintillating white-hot torrents, which flooded the world with brilliance. My eyes, wounded by the blaze, involuntarily closed. And when they opened again, the sky was all cloaked in a milky wavering light, interrupted here and there by brassy flashes as of monster firecrackers going off. The light was sufficient for me to see that a great segment of the tenements was not there any more.

"All this time an elemental din and racket, as loud as a hurricane, was in my ears. For a moment this subsided, giving place to the cries, the ululations of a multitude. Then once more the sky was torn open near the zenith, and something like an incandescent sword stabbed through, slashing with strokes of lightning from horizon to horizon. It was like the sword of the Destroying Angel! And the whole world flickered with a blaze of unnatural day; the sparks were whipped in torrents before a wind that came up as if from nowhere; and the thunders boomed in detonations that shook the very floor beneath us. And then irrationally, wildly, as if by common agreement, the four of us started down to the street. We did not know where we were going; we were but members of a crazed, stampeding mob; we threshed, squirmed and pushed insanely amid multitudes that pushed, squirmed and threshed. By the savage light of the heavens, which were slit and wounded by new blades of uncanny brightness, we could see that the entire western half of our great city was gone; the very hills supporting the houses were now level with the plain—except where here and there gaping canyons had been scooped out. I happened to be pushed near one such chasm; a dull glaring river, as of molten lead, was flowing sluggishly in its depths, giving off thick gray fumes with an ashen odor.

"Then the earth shook. Some of the people, shrieking, were hurled into the abysses; others, clinging to wives or children, struggled to get away, though there was nowhere to go amid the screaming, fear-maddened rabble that blocked every turn and thoroughfare.

"The last scene came with meteoric swiftness. Suddenly an ominous new hissing dominated all the other noises. While I huddled with my loved ones against a crumbling wall, all at once the whole sky

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seemed to be collapsing. Yes, that's the only way I can express it—the whole sky seemed to be collapsing. It had split apart; it was falling, tumbling upon us in an inverted ocean of coppery light. Within an instant it was upon us, an avalanche of brilliance—of heat that seared like a volcano's breath. In my agony, I clung to my wife, who writhed like a trodden worm; then I choked; my nostrils filled with something hot and suffocating; and, grasping at my heart, I fell, and looked up with tormented dying eyes at the fire-cleft heavens. The last that I saw was something red and mountainous plummeting down like the smiting fist of the very cosmos. The last that I heard was a tremendous long-drawn wail, like the pain-stricken voice of millions pleading in grief and protest from all eternity."

A long silence followed. Orton mopped his brow. His eyes, bulging and burning, were those of one who re-lives some horrible adventure.

"So that was all, then?" Dr. Rhys prompted, after a delay.

"Yes, that was all. The next moment, as I've mentioned, I came to myself in the laboratory. I tell you, I could hardly believe that the clock still pointed to 5.14."

"No doubt. No doubt. Then you have no explanation for this—h'm—this extraordinary experience?"

Orton, like one just come out of a deep trance, looked at the examiner in a bewildered way.

"No, Doctor," he answered, slowly, "I wouldn't say I have no explanation. But it's such a queer one—well, I don't know if it really solves anything."

"Let's hear it."

"Well, as I told you, I'd been examining the atoms through my Amplified Electro-Photoscope. What if, by some psychic transformation, I really saw into the sub-atomic universe? What if each particle within the atom is a world, with people whose struggles and sorrows are as real as our own? Time, of course, would be on the same reduced scale as space; ages might be compressed within a few seconds."

Dr. Rhys tapped on his pad.

"By the same token, Doctor, we ourselves may be but an atom to the super-galaxy. For a native of one of those greater universes, all that has happened, since the earth was born from the pristine nebula, might occur between two heartbeats."

"Yes, indeed. Most unusual hypothesis," grunted Dr. Rhys. "Well, Professor, just give me a little time to correlate the data on your case. You'll have my diagnosis within a week. Good-day, sir."

Long after the patient had left, the psychiatrist sat idly stroking his brow. His face wore a puzzled expression. He kept looking at one hand, as if it perplexed and fascinated him. He could not help remembering the billions upon billions of atoms enclosed within that small bit of matter.

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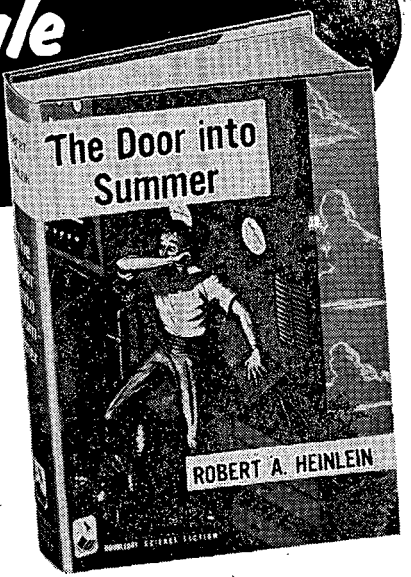

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